



SC
1-6

文学少女の首飾

理林美貝

角川文庫

文学少女

理林美貝

MIZUKI NOMURA

首飾



角川文庫

文学少女と
死にたがりの道化



An illustration of a young woman with long, flowing pink hair, wearing a black hat and a black dress. She is lying down, looking up with a gentle expression. Her hair is styled in a long braid with a yellow ribbon. She is surrounded by several books, some of which are open. The background is a soft, light blue and green wash.

天野遠子

これだから文学少女は油断がならない。
頭の中が文学してておおよそ現実的じゃないから、
目を離すとなにをしでかすかわからない。
平気で他人を巻き込む。

井上心葉

なにも起こらないこと。
誰も好きにならないこと。
痛みも悲しみも絶望もなく、
おだやかに生きてゆくこと。
そんな毎日をぼくは願う。



「文学少女」と死にたがりの道化

登場人物

002

天野遠子

本日
おの
やつ
井上心葉

井上心葉

001



恥の多い生涯を送って来ました。

恥ずかしい。

生きていることが恥ずかしい。

あの日、自分は、人を殺めました。
神様も、もう自分を助けてはくだらないでしょう。



こんにちは。ファミ通文庫ではお初にお目にかかります。竹岡美穂です。
野村さんからお預かりした、遠子さんや心葉君達に、ようやくなんとか、
制服や、本や鞆や原稿用紙をもたせて送り出せそうです。
忘れ物は無いか！



編集さんをはじめ、デザイナーさん、印刷屋さんにも
大変お世話になりました。どうもありがとうございます。

カバーイラスト用
其ノ寸
だったもの。



Bungaku Shoujo: Volume1 Prologue

Mine has been a life of much shame.

Amongst a flock of white sheep, I was born the peculiar black sheep.

I cannot experience the joy my companions can feel, or the sadness my companions can feel, nor can I eat the same things my companions can eat.

Alien to its companions' feelings of affection- love, kindness, empathy, and many others, all the tragic black sheep can do is cover its black wool with white powder, and pretend to be a white sheep.

Even now I am still wearing the mask, and play the part of the clown.

Prologue: The flashback that takes the place of my self-introduction ----- a former genius Bishoujo writer

Mine has been a life of much shame.

What? Who once said something like that?

An actor? An athlete? Or was it a politician who got arrested for accepting bribes?

Let's not mind too much of who said it.

I just entered my 2nd year of senior high school. It is a bit pretentious of me to say things like "mine has been a life of..." But when I was 14, I did experience events that shocked all who were involved. The events that happened knocked me over as if they were the rough waves of the sea. In one short year, I actually felt as if my life had ended.

In one year, I became the mysterious Bishoujo writer who became popular and well known throughout Japan.

This happened in the spring of my 3rd year of junior high school.

Back then I was 14, and was fast approaching the 15-year-old mark. I was a very ordinary student. I had friends, and I had someone I liked. Those were quite the days. And then, as if I swallowed the wrong medicine, I submitted my very first novel scripts to an amateur writing contest held by a literature magazine. Incredibly, I became the youngest writer ever to win the contest. The story was written as a girl narrating in a first person point of view. Furthermore, I used the female name Miu Asakura as the pen name, so the magazine thought-

"The youngest writer ever! The award-winning, 3rd year, 14-year-old girl author!"

“Such a genuine writing style and yet, such sensibly delicate delivery of the plot and theme! The story has every judge complimenting it in glee!”

The magazine used such phrases to market my story.

Oh gosh, I feel so ashamed.

“Girl writers are usually more popular. Let’s market you as a mask-wearing, mysterious, cute, Bishoujo writer!”

Under the extreme persuasions from the editorial staff...

(How would the reader know that I am a “cute” Bishoujo if I wear a mask?)

I all but grudgingly agreed to publish my story. Then the book became a bestseller. Then it became a bestseller with more than a million copies sold. Then it got adapted into a movie, a TV drama series, even a manga series. The whole population was practically talking about the book.

I was shocked.

My family was dumbfounded as well.

“What? My child actually... but he's just a normal little kid. My God, what’s going on? What?! The royalty fee is over a hundred million yen! Wah! That’s 20 times father’s annual income!”

They jabbered in awe.

On the train, one could see (in large font) the name of my book on the advertisement board hanging in the interior walls. When one entered a bookstore, he would see the books, with their beautiful “book lumbar,” stacked like sturdy fortresses in front of the cash registers.

“The author of this book, Miu, is a junior high school student! What kinds of girl is she? She's probably really cute, right?”

“I heard she's a descendant of a noble family. She must be the heiress, that’s why she wouldn’t show her face!”

“She must have grown up in a very luxurious environment and had never held anything heavier than a pen in her entire life!”

“Probably! The title “bungaku shoujo” makes you feel like- she must be a pure cute shoujo. Ahhgg! Miu is too moe~~~”

Every time I hear something like this, I feel so ashamed that I could just stop breathing.

Sorry! Please let me be! That story was just the result of my sudden nonsensical gibberish. It wasn't anything worth reading! It was just some mumbo jumbo that I wrote during classes. It just so happened that I won the award. I am so very sorry. What "sensibly delicate delivery," it's all just balderdash. All of it was just a bored boy's drivel. What happened in the contest was just the judges' sly planning - if a fourteen-year-old girl wins the literature award, things would become interesting! People would start talking about books; this could stimulate the fledging publishing community! Publishers would be glad to have books that are popular. Everyone has gone way over their heads. I don't have much talent. Please spare me of this, please!

My limitlessly guilty conscience, plus a disaster that happened near the end of the whole mess, caused me to become hyperventilated from the accumulated stress and faint in school. As I was being hustled to the hospital, I mentally broke down and, with tears covering my face, cried, "I can't write novels anymore." Later on, I started to refuse going to school, this made my father, mother, and sister very worried.

What a shameful year.

So, the mask-wearing, genius, Bishoujo writer Miu Asakura only wrote one single book before she disappeared without a trace. And I, just like any other normal junior high school student, took the senior high entrance exam and became a senior high school student. Because of this, I got to know the real "bungaku shoujo"- Tooko Amano-senpai.

But, why am I writing again now?

Because on that day, under the glimmering light of a white manglietia tree, I met Tooko-senpai.

Bungaku Shoujo: Volume1 Chapter1

Chapter 1: Tooko-senpai Is a Gourmet

“Gallico’s stories are filled with the flavor of winter. It is as if fresh snow was quiescently melting on your tongue. That feeling of nippiness intertwining with surreality- it cleanses my heart of all its impurity. Such beauty, yet with a touch of sorrow.” Tooko-senpai gasped as she looked through Paul Gallico’s short stories anthology.

The club we are in, KiyoshiJou School’s Literature Club, is located at a four-story high complex, at the west side corner of the third building.

Whenever the sun set, its golden sunlight shines through the windows as if the classroom were being poured with honey.

The old cardboard boxes that were used as storage containers were currently stacked at the corners of the room. In the middle there was an old beech table, plus two iron bookshelves and a drawer. All these are blanketed with books. Books that have no room to be placed are piled at every corner. If an earthquake strikes, the towers of books would definitely collapse. It seems very likely that we would be trapped under the book rubble and die of suffocation.

Sitting in this narrow room, filled with the musty odor of old books and mildew, was Tooko-senpai. With her knees bent, and her feet on the chair, one could almost make out the sight of her panties. Moreover, every time she shifted her positions, one could get a glimpse. Her posture is very inappropriate.

Senpai put her pale face on her bent kneecaps and, with her arms wrapped around her legs, she carefully turned the page of the book she was reading with those slender fingers of hers.

Her black bangs were reclined on her white forehead. Her long braids were hanging from her shoulder to her waist. Her skin was so pale that, in contrast, her black hair, eyebrows, and irises seemed as if they were glimmering.

When Tooko-senpai was silent, she appeared graceful to the point of being like a doll.

But...

Tooko-senpai’s slender fingers slowly tore part of the page out and put the strip into her mouth. She held the piece in her mouth and, like a goat munching on grass, she started chewing.

(Oh my god, she's eating paper...she's eating it. This scene seems surreal to me no matter how many times I witness it.)

Then she swallowed.

Her throat gave a bit of a gulping sound as she swallowed the paper. After she was done with that piece, she tore out another strand of paper and ate it. Almost immediately, her apathetic expression changed into an expression of bliss. The corner of her eyes fell and her face gave a very sweet smile.

“Gallico’s stories always taste so good~~~~~Ahh, Gallico! He was born in New York. The movie adaptation of his book ‘The Poseidon Adventure’ and his children literature series ‘Mrs. Harris’ are deservedly famous. However I think his best work is ‘The Snow Goose’! The artist, Rhayader, who live a solitary life in an abandoned lighthouse, and the girl, Fritha, who held an injured white goose when she met Rhayader –their hearts communicate with such silent grieve! They both have boundless affection and empathy, yet the characters never converse! Sigh, what an innocent love! Did you know? Konoha, not everything can be expressed through noisy verbalization. Thoughts that are truly important should be kept inside one’s heart until he dies. Only by resisting the temptation to speak can one admire the beauty of lamentation! I cry every time I get to the ending. Gallico’s stories can cool one’s feverish heart; just like how high class chilled Gelatin dessert can heal one’s mental scars. That throat soothing sensation, absolutely superb. Oh, you must read ‘Jennie’ and ‘Snowflake’ as well! I recommend Sumiko Yagawa’s translation edition!”

I put the fifty pages a stack genkoo yoshi onto the uneven table. Then, with a HB pencil, I prepared myself to write a three topic short story. Today’s topics were “First Love”, “Strawberry Daifuku”, and “The Parliament Building”- these topics seemed a bit nonsensical to me.

As I lowered my head and started writing, I calmly retorted Senpai with comebacks.

“Because Tooko Senpai is a monster, one that cannot taste anything other than words on papers, you don’t know what chilled jelly tastes like; how can you do analogies with it?”

The moment I said it, Tooko-senpai became so miffed that she puffed her cheeks.



“Of course I can. I can use my imagination to compensate for this fault. Ahhhh! The taste of chilled jelly must taste like this. And Konoha, you called me a monster; this is a prejudiced term. I only want to swallow all the stories and words in this world into my stomach. I am just a normal high student who happens to have a deep love for literature. A common bungaku shoujo.

“I don’t think a normal high school girl would just tear books apart and then swallow the pieces as if they were the most delicious things in this world. At least in the 16 years of my life, I have never heard of a high school student as weird as Tooko-senpai.”

Tooko-senpai became even more disgruntled, and the puffs on her cheeks grew even bigger. She shouted-

“That is so insensitive of you! You actually called a girl weird right in front of her, you are so unthoughtful! I am hurt. Konoha, despite you having such a gentle face that suggests you may name the roses in your house “Nancy” or “Betty” or something and tend to them, you actually say such mean things to your Senpai.”

Tooko-senpai became disgruntled and muttered “Gosh! Sheesh~~~”, but she recovered almost instantly. She sprang from her chair with a loud thud and, with a merry expression on her face, she walked toward me.

“Ah well. My forgiveness is as encompassing as the Andromeda galaxy. I won’t pay much attention to impolite things an insolent Kouhai said. Now, is my ‘snack’ ready?”

She really is a very straightforward person, so much so that when she asks for snacks, even her tone becomes lively. If she were a cat, one could probably hear her gulping saliva down her throat at this moment.

The 3rd year student Tooko Amano-senpai is the president of the Literature Club; she is also a monster who likes to eat stories. She sees book pages and words on papers as bread and water, and happily devours them.

One year ago, this French braid bungaku shoujo dragged me into the Literature Club. From then on, every time we get off from classes, she would nag me “I am hungry, hurry and write something, come on....” I would then proceed to scribble some poems or stories.

Now I am in the 2nd month of my 2nd year, yet the Literature Club has Tooko-senpai and I as its only members. We couldn’t get any 1st year student to join. A few days ago, she finally lost her patience. She stuffed the overdue club brochures to me, and ordered me “Konoha, as the club president, I will entrust these to you!”

So I swallowed my pride and, with me blushing furiously, stood at the entrance of the school to hand out the brochures. Even then, no new students joined.

Maybe Tooko Senpai and I are destined to uphold this club...?

I already decided to quit writing, why would I join the Literature Club? Writing should have become irritating for me.

The reason for this is that writing snacks for this monstrous senpai is no longer a tedious task- it has become part of my daily life... Tooko-senpai took out a silver hand watch from her front pocket and shoved it to my face.

“Look look. There are only 5 minutes remaining. For the sake of your respected senpai, please write something that is super sweet! Gallico’s stories are known for their inner calmness and are refreshingly untainted, so for this time~~~ It’s best if it’s a heart-warming story. Tragic stories are beautiful in themselves, but a romance story must be coupled with a happy ending. Don’t

make the main character died of leukemia or a heart attack, or have his plane crash, or him choking to death by eating strawberry daifuku, or anything similar in tone!”

I got it.

I decided to change the plot.

I will write that the main character and his first love, after years of separation, coincidentally run into each other in front of the parliament building. The girl will then be killed by a box of strawberry daifuku falling onto her head, and the story will end tragically!

Tooko-senpai put her chin on her hands and, with her elbows supporting the weight of her head, smiled at me.

She looked as if she were a well-mannered lady; when she was waiting for her food or snacks, however, her obsession surfaced as if she were a little kid. Her eyes gleamed with eager anticipation.

“Ho ho. Handwritten compositions are my favorites. When one reads Ougai or Souseki’s compositions, the reader will taste the sweetness of ripened fruit. On the other hand, the writings of amateurs have that bitter fresh taste that attracts me. Especially those handwritten compositions- it is as if you use your hands to lade water from a clean creek and sip the crystal clear water from your palm- it calms one to the heart! And so fresh and sweet as if you are enjoying some just-harvested tomatoes or yellow pickles! Even though sometimes the fruits taste a bit like dirt, they are still very, very, very delicious!”

My compositions are tomatoes and yellow pickles...?

If I tell her that I was the mysterious bishoujo writer, what sort of expressions would she have?

Of course, I would never mention that incident ever again in my life.

“Look, two minutes left. Crunch time. Do your best.”

Tooko-senpai started cheering for me. She slightly tilted her neck and, with her eyes looking upward, happily stared at me.

Senpai, you are too naïve. I won’t let things go as you wish.

And right as this moment-

“Excuse me! Waaaah!”

The room’s door opened and, with a banging noise, a person tripped right through the doorway.

A girl was on the ground. Her school uniform skirt is flipped inside out; her teddy bear panties were plainly in sight.

Just as I realized that this person was wearing the same style of panties as my primary school freshman younger sister, she groaned and tried to stand up.

When she tried to outstretch her arms to balance herself, however, she managed to knock over the book pillars. The pillars toppled over and knocked her face back onto the ground.

“Ahhhhg!”

Bang! Clang!

“Muaaa....Aaah....nose....my nose....”

The girl, a bit shaken, pressed her palms onto her nose. Tooko-senpai saw this and hurriedly run to her.

“Konoha, don’t look!”

Senpai hastily straightened the girl’s skirt; unfortunately I already saw what she prohibited me to see. Then again, I am not the kind of special fetishist who gets excited by having a glimpse of teddy bear panties.

“Are you all right?”

Tooko-senpai gently took the girl by her arms, and tried help her up. The girl, seemingly embarrassed by the accident, remained stationed on the ground. Her face, I noticed, started to blush furiously.

“Aaah, I’m fine. Sorry. I always trip and fall. My specialty is falling on to the ground even when there is nothing for me to trip over. I’m used to this. Don’t worry about me.”

I can hardly think this can be described as a “specialty”!

“Sorry. I am Chia Takeda from 1st year 2nd class. I came here today to get your help on something that is super important.” She had a long and fluffy hair style. Her body size was quite petite. All in all she looked like a mini Lion Dog or a Bichon Frisé puppy.

Maybe she wanted to join the Literature Club? Perhaps all those fliers Tooko-senpai asked me to hand out actually had an effect? If this was the case, fantastic. The more students that join the club, the more I can offload the duty of writing Senpai’s snacks to others.

Just as I’m starting to salivate at this prospect, Takeda-san put her hands tightly together, and asked with a very determined voice:

“Please help me with my love relationship!”

My mind froze, but I immediately recovered and asked:

“But we are the Literature Club?”

Takeda-san looked at me and nodded her head energetically.

“Yes! I saw the mailbox!”

“Mailbox....?”

I lost what she was saying.

“In the corner of the courtyard, next to the trees, didn’t someone secretly put a mailbox there? On the mailbox it says ‘We will help you with your love life. If you need assistance, write to us! Brought to you by the members of the Literature Club.’ An incredible sensation came over me when I saw the mailbox. This must be a gift sent by God. I could hardly wait, so I just ran straight here.”

I became startled, and then I realized what was going on.

“Tooko-senpai!”

Only Tooko-senpai would do something like that.

Tooko-senpai put her arms onto Takeda-san’s shoulders. She looked pleased.

“Hm, you came at the right time. I am the president, Tooko Amano. Leave everything to us!”

At once, I stood up. To Senpai's turned back, I yelled,

“Wait a second. You said ‘us.’ Did you count ‘me’ in as well?”

“Of course. All members of the Literature Club will do their best and become Takeda-san’s love consultants-”

“Takeda is very grateful of you all!”

“You're kidding me right?!- Oh my god!”

“But we have one condition that you have to agree to.”

Tooko-senpai reached over and covered my mouth with her hand, and then, with a sober expression, turned to Takeda-san,

“On the day Takeda-san’s becomes successful, I want you to record down in detail everything that happened, and give me a report of your love story.”

“What? Write a report? I dread writing essays.”

“Don’t worry, just write down the things that happen and how you earnestly feel about them. When a normal person tries their best to convert their emotions into words, it is even more satisfying to read than compositions with all sorts of different writing techniques! Don’t write the report as a checklist or write trivial things; Write the report in essay format. Also, don’t use a word processor. You must hand write your report on paper. Don’t forget to write, ok?”

Tooko-senpai, with her slender fingers, grabbed Takeda-san’s pinky finger. Then, Senpai wrapped her own pinky finger around Takeda-san’s, and cheerfully did a pinky swear.

This was your real intention wasn’t it, Tooko-senpai.

It seems that my writings alone were not enough to satisfy Senpai’s eating obsession. That’s why she placed that love consulting mailbox- to squeeze some love stories out of the clients.

Even if a normal person came across such a ridiculous idea, he or she would probably laugh it off; Tooko-senpai, however, would definitely try to turn the idea into reality. One could say this trait was her principle of life.

So, someone must care for this literature girl.

Because her brain is filled with literature related stuff, she often loses her common sense. If there were no one to look out for her, she would do something drastic. She might even drag innocent bystanders into her affairs.

“OK, Takeda will try her best to write many reports.”

It seems that Takeda-san is very naive and impressionable (A sane person would not, upon the sight of the mailbox, run to this strange Literature Club, right?) Her eyes were dazzled with glitters, and she looked at Tooko-senpai with a passionate expression. I think she has already chosen Senpai as her dear older sister[Translation: think Maria sama ga Miteru].

Tooko-senpai puffed up her A-cup (estimated) flat chest, and cockily said,

“No problem, we provide the best service. We, as members of the Literature Club, are experts in all trades of romance stories, whether they are Western, Eastern, Ancient, or Modern compositions. With our expertise in writings, Takeda-san, we will write the best love letters you have ever seen. This person here, Konoha, will assist you with the letters”

“What?!”

I'm already sick of Senpai's seemingly never ending desire for more literature food, that's why I've ignored them up to this point. But I still got a bit of a shock when she declared:

"The Ace of the Literature Club, Konoha, will write your love letters. The letters are guaranteed to melt your secret lover's heart."

"Tooko-senpai! What nonsense are you talking about again? I have never written a single love letter!"

I protested, even though I knew eventually she would reach over, cover my mouth with her hand, and brush off whatever objections I had! The only thing I could do was abide by her orders unwillingly.

"To date, he has created hundreds of love letters. He is the romance story specialist, Konoha! Just leave everything to him. Konoha once joined the xyz Romance Literature Writing Contest. He effortlessly blew away all the competitors and got the number one position in the Contest!"

What bull is she making up now? What is this xyz contest? I have a feeling no one in this town has even heard of such a lame contest.

"Wahh, amazing! I have such a fantastic writer to aid me, I'm so happy."

I told you I am not a writer!... No, I mean, I was a writer at one point... A bestselling writer, in fact... But right now I am only a normal high school student, a servant who prepares Tooko-senpai's snacks. How can I help others write their love letters?

As I muse over my current situation, Tooko-senpai thoughtfully decided everything for me.

"Konoha-senpai, thank you for your aid!"

"Yep! No problem here, right Konoha?"

In the end, I have to play the part of a female student, trying to write a love letter to her secret lover.

End Note-

After Takeda-san left the classroom, Tooko-senpai began snacking on my three topic composition. As she eats, I noticed, she looked as if she were about to cry-

"Oh my gosh, why! The girl got killed by a free-falling box of strawberry daifuku landing on her head. No! I won't accept it! This tastes odd! It's like having red bean paste [dessert, extremely sweet] floating in my miso soup[very salty]!. Ughh, I want to hurl. This tastes so bad~~~~~"

Bungaku Shoujo: Volume1 Chapter2

Chapter 2 – The Most Delicious Story In This World



The first time I noticed my deviancy was when my grandmother, who treasured me very much, passed away from this world.

I remember after my grandmother had the heart attack, she had to stay on her bed all the time. Whenever I came near her bed to visit her, she would always gently stroke my head and say, “You are such a good child.” She would look pleased. Her eyes would squeeze into two tiny lines as she smiled.

But I was not what my grandmother thought I was- an obedient and empathic child. Her scrawny hands, her shriveled up face, her muddled white hair, and the disgusting medicine stench emitted from her body, all these revolted and horrified me to no end.

“You are such a good child.”

Every time she used that coarse voice to whisper to my ears, I would feel like she had laid a jinx on me. My neck would become stiff, my body would shudder.

If grandmother found out I was not a good child; if she found out that I loathed her- no doubt she would stand straight up from her bed. Her white hair would stand on their ends like a yashya, red flames would come out of her hazes, and that would swallow me alive. I was really frightened by these thoughts, so dreaded that I would lie in bed at night, eyes wide open, cold sweat coming off my back.

So, I became even more careful. Careful so that she could not see my true face. I tried even harder to be a good child. I would deliver her three meals every day. I would wipe her sweat. I did all I could to comfort her. I even placed my face onto her chest, and sweetly said “I love you, grandma,” or I would kiss her cheek.

The skin of the senile grandmother was as dry as arid leaves, and reeked of those repulsive medicines. I was really scared that her disease would infect me as well. Every time I was done I would dash to the washroom. I would rinse and brush my mouth as hard as I could. I brushed so hard sometimes my gum starts to bleed, and blood would seep all over my cavity. At this point, I often felt I was a very bad child who only knew how to lie well. My throat would start to ache, and my face would become red hot.

One day, grandmother's body became cold. She would not move anymore.

"You really are a kind and sweet good child."

As grandmother muttered this as if to herself, her hand, which was patting my head, dropped down suddenly. Her face became as pale as a wax candle. I did not feel sad. I just left the just deceased grandmother's body on the bed, and ran to the city park to play. I went back to my home near sunset. As I entered the door, my mom immediately ran to me and hugged me. She said, "Grandma died." At that time, however, my heart was strangely as calm as a desolate forest.

After a few days, the funeral service for grandmother started. During the service, I did not shed a single tear. All the adults in the event noticed this and talked amongst themselves: "It is probably because he is so young. He doesn't understand that his favorite grandmother has passed away. What a tragedy!"

When I heard the adults say that, a great sense of shame swelled inside of me. My ears became very hot. I could not lift my face up and stare ahead. But that wasn't because I was sad for my grandmother's death; No, I was ashamed of my deceitful acts.

And that, since I was small, is how I lived my life.



(What a hassle! How could I write a love letter?!)

The time was the following day's morning class.

As the class started, I too had started a laborious war against my first love letter in life. I half covered the rough drafts on my desk with my school notebooks, and strenuously tried to decide on the letter's style.

"To Kataoka Shuuji-senpai,

I deeply apologize for abruptly writing this letter to you.

I think you must be shocked to receive this.

My name is Takeda Chia. The pronunciation of the word 千愛 is 'chi-a'. I have just entered the Class 1-2 of Seikudari High School this spring.

Once when I got off from school, I saw Shuuji-senpai practicing in the Archery Club range. I think you looked wonderful. From then on I had fallen in love with you."

(Yikes, this won't work. The wording is too stern.)

"To Kataoka Shuuji-senpai,

Hello! This is my first time writing to you~~~~~

I am Takeda Chia, but all my friends call me Chia or Chi-Chan.

I am in Class 1-2. My seat number is eleven, my Zodiac sign is Cancer, and my blood type is B.

This may sound a bit out of the blue, but I must tell you this, I have fallen in love with you Senpai!

Kyaaa, this is so embarrassing!"

(I think just by writing this letter, I am even more embarrassed. This makes me feel like a moron.)

Just like this, with my face blushing, I rewrite the letter countless times.

What on earth am I doing?

Tooko-senpai, with her know-it-all tone, said this to me-

"Your compositions do not have enough passion in them. This is a good chance for you to practice, so don't slack! Try and imagine Chia's heart, and write a love letter that resembles what a love stricken girl would write- something sweet and sour. Something that will make the readers feel as if this world is sparkling, so happy that no one can stand it. This is the mood you should imitate. If you accomplish this, whoever receives this letter will think 'Chia is such a cute girl!' Then he will realize that he is loved by such a pure and innately beautiful girl, he will be touched."

I can't stand this. If that's the case, then I will stand aside and let Tooko-senpai be the writer.

"I only eat." She answered shamelessly and snickered.

On the blackboard there was a drawing of the DNA helix structure. The white haired biology teacher monotonically explained how chromosomes and genetic worked.

Seikudari High School is a well known school for getting into universities, thus most people who study here are taking down notes seriously. Right now there is only the voice of the teacher, and the scraping noise of pens agilely grazing on papers. Then again, there are a few who are not listening to the teacher. They are mostly playing with their cell phones under the desks.

(But none of them are probably listening to the class and writing a love letter at the same time, right? Writing love letters is not fashionable anymore. Haven't most people switched to text messaging already?)

I suddenly realized that I'm writing a love letter during class time, and my face got even hotter.

(No, that's not it. This is not a love letter from me. This is Chia-san's love letter. Chia is the person who likes Shuuji-senpai, not me...eh, why am I vindicating myself.)

I suppose I will listen to Tooko-senpai's suggestion and try imitating Chia's thoughts and emotions as I write the letter. So, the first thing I tried to imagine was the face of the love stricken Chia-

"The student Chia secretly likes is Kataoka Shuuji-senpai. He is an Archery Club 3rd year student. When I first entered this school, I toured most of the clubs here. When I went to Archery Club, however, I saw the handsome Shuuji-senpai practicing archery. Shuuji-senpai's steadily pulled~~~~ the grip and the string apart, and stared at the center of the target intensely. In that moment, my eyes and the air around me froze; I couldn't move my eyes away from him. I stopped my walk, and with bated breath I watched.

You know, before I saw him, something very bad happened to me, and I was very depressed around that time.

But by seeing Shuuji-senpai's profile, all my distress became a puff of smoke, and floated away. When Shuuji-senpai's arrow shot into the center of the red target, it felt as if his arrow had also shot into my heart.

Then Shuuji-senpai, bright and kind as a little kid, smiled sweetly. Oh my gosh, that was the most fantastic smile I had ever seen! Just like that I fell in love with Shuuji-senpai.

I am an athletic idiot, so I can't join the Archery Club; but I always go to the range to spy on Shuuji-senpai. I heard other club members called him Kataoka, Juu, or Juu-chan, that's how I found his name. When Shuuji-senpai is not practicing, he seems to possess a great sense of humor, quite unlike his sober outer appearance. He always crack jokes and stuff and makes everyone laugh.

But when he is practicing archery, his serious and imperturbable expression appears. On one hand, when he is not practicing he seems good natured; on the other hand, when he is practicing, he looks so focused it's a bit scary. However, if he misses the center, he would let out "ah~~", and chuckle goatishly. If he did hit the center, he would be as happy as a child, jumping and cheering at the same time- "I hit it!"

When Shuuji-senpai is practicing his archery, what is he thinking? I keep on wondering this question. From that, my whole heart became filled with anything that has to do with Shuuji-senpai. I want to know more about Shuuji-senpai; I also want to let Shuuji-senpai know someone like me exists.”

Whenever Senpai talked about books, she would start talking incessantly, in much of the same way as whenever Chia-san talked about Shuuji-senpai.

Her puffy blushing face, with glittering eyes, the happiness and bliss that came from her heart, just talks and talks about anything that has to do with Shuuji-senpai.

I think I got pretty close to the real thing...Chia-san likes Shuuji-senpai so much- I must at least try and express that feeling for her in the letter. If Chia-san's confession failed because of my letter, I would get nightmares every night...

I flipped to a new page of the rough draft paper, and I tried to record down Chia-san's inner emotions into words bit by bit.

“I want Shuuji-senpai to know me.

I want to know more about Shuuji-senpai.

So I gathered my courage and wrote this letter.”

.....

.....

“The letter is done. Here you go.”

After school, I folded my papers into four rectangles, and gave them to Chia-san.

“I didn’t write any rough drafts. I only used my lunch break to write them. They were written quite sloppily, so I can’t guarantee their quality...”

“Wahh, thank you so much!”

Chia-san started jumping up and down happily. With an expression of delight, she accepted the letters.

“Wahh, there are three letters! You wrote so much during the short lunch break? No wonder you are the ace of the Literature Club.”

“You...you are too kind.”

“Hehe, can I read them out loud?”

Chia-san attempted to open the folded papers, but I hurriedly stopped her.

“Wah, don’t! Don’t read them here!”

“Why does it matter, I want to know what’s written inside as well. Konoha put everything he got into these love letters!”

As Tooko-senpai smiled mischievously, she slowly walked to Chia San’s side to peek at the content of the letters.

I immediately moved in between them.

“No! Absolutely not!”

“Okay, I know. I’ll be going home then. I need to get home fast and write down Senpai’s letters onto proper papers. I already brought the envelopes- they’re light pink, with pictures of sakura petals printed all over them. They’re so cute!”

“Hm, very good! Now go home!”

I hectically tried to sway Chia-san to go home.

“Bye, do you best!”

“Okay, thank you for your help.”

“Don’t forget to write the reports~~~~~”

“I know~~~~~”

Chia-san waved her hand holding the letter, and answered happily.

As she left, she fell onto the floor again, but she stood back up right away. She giggled embarrassedly and went away. All I did was nervously watch her leave.

“Ahh~~~~”, I want to read what’s written inside. Those are the result of Konoha’s three days of non-stop grinding!” When I saw Tooko-senpai, with her arms hugging her bent legs on her chair, squinting at me, my ears started to burn. This is bad, she saw through me again.

“I can’t do that. If I let Tooko-senpai have a look, you would want to see what they taste like. All the letters would then proceed into your stomach.”

I intentionally said that in a mocking tone, so Tooko-senpai became annoyed and raised her lower lip/chin.

“Hey! I am not that fixated on eating!”

Then she buried her cheeks into her knees, and stared straight with a dazed expression.

Her cat-tail like, long, French braids slid down slowly from her slender shoulders.

“But, so good, love letters. They're so sweet, so tempting to all who see them. Hey, what do you think the most delicious story in the world is, Konoha-kun?”

“I don't know.....”

Tooko-senpai gently smiled.

“I think that would be a love letter that my lover, with his most sincere effort, put all his feelings for me into. In this world, that letter is uniquely for me, and only for me. That would be the thing I hold most dearly.”

After she said that, an embarrassed yet blissful smile appeared on Senpai's face.

“But if that's the case, I might treasure the letter so much that I don't dare to eat it. Hmmm, this is quite bothersome. I have the world's most delicious food right in front of me, yet I can't eat it. How agonizing!”

Senpai was probably very bothered by the prospect. She pressed on her forehead with her fingers showing a painful expression on her face. I couldn't help but laughed out loud.

“Those kinds of things won't happen, Senpai. On the night you get the love letter, you would give in to the temptation and eat all there was to eat. I'm willing to bet a Complete Set of Natsume Souseki's Work on this.”

“Ah~~~~”, so mean! You're so mean. You're so not caring about my feelings!”

Senpai sulkily sat down on a chair, and turned her back towards me. She kept herself in that state until I wrote some composition snacks for her. Only then did her mood improve.

“Fuuu[TL note: ふーんだ, a sfx made while mad]. Next time I will write your name down a thousand times into a notebook, and then I will tear the pages apart, and eat all the pieces into my stomach. That should jinx you.”

“That's not very mature behavior, Tooko-senpai.”

On the following day's lunch break, Takeda-san, with her airily footsteps, came to my classroom.

“Is Konoha-senpai here?”

Upon saying this, a commotion started in the classroom.

I hurriedly stood up.

“Ah, Konoha-senpai!”

Takeda-san waved her hand at me. Everyone’s attention now turned towards me.

“Takeda-san, follow me.”

I quickly walked down the corridor and turned to the deserted staircase. After she arrived, I asked her what was up, and she answered me very cheerfully-

“Today when I was going to school, I waited on the road for Shuuji-senpai. I handed the love letter you wrote for me to him.”

“Oh, that quickly?”

She sure has put her thoughts into actions swiftly. I, on the other hand, cannot be said the same; I was very impressed at her way of taking immediate actions.

“It was as if my heart was about to leap out. I said to Shuuji-senpai “Please read this.” I gave him the letter, and then I ran away. After that my mind was hazy- During my morning classes I didn’t hear what my friends or my teachers said. All I could think of was ‘Shuuji-senpai should have read the letter by now, what does he think of the letter?’”

“Then what?” I couldn’t help but clutched my sweating palms together.

“By lunch time my chest felt stiff, and I couldn’t eat my lunch, so I went to the archery range. Shuuji-senpai was there and...”

“And?”

Takeda became so happy her face got even redder. She did a victory sign to me.

“He happily thanked me for the letter! He said that while he couldn’t immediately accept my confession, we could try starting as senpai-kohai [TL note: think starting as friends].”

“That was pretty good, wasn’t it?”

I was in a similar state as Takeda; my heart was about to leap out of my chest as well.

“Yes! Shuuji-senpai said he's never received a love letter as cute as this. This is all thanks to Konoha-senpai. With your skills, no wonder you won the xyz Romance Literature Writing Contest!”

“Hahaha, those letters were just drafts I scribbled during lunch break.”

“No. After Shuuji-senpai read the letter, he seemed much livelier. So I promised him that I'd write a love letter to him every day.”

“What?!”

I shouted.

Write a love letter everyday...?

“Konoha-senpai, I will really have to depend on you on this. You could write such fantastic letters during mere lunch breaks, this won’t trouble you at all.”

She, with her utmost sincere and trustful tone, held my hand up with both her hands.

On the following day, after the end of the first period, Takeda came to my classroom again.

“Konoha-senpai, good morning! Shuuji-senpai loved yesterday’s letter as well. Konoha-senpai is so amazing; you’re a genius! You’ll definitely become a bestselling author one day.”

“Ha...haha...thanks. Here is today’s letter.”

“Wah, thank you. I have math next class. I’ll try to find time to review the letter. I hope Shuuji-senpai will like this as well.”

“Yeah...”

My smile became a bit strained.

Tooko-senpai snickered and said that I had brought this onto myself.

“So, you’ll stick with Takeda to the end, right? You literary giant?”

With her legs resting sideways on her chair, Tooko-senpai held a paperback book with one of her hands. Her clear black pupils were staring sideways at me.

In her hand was American writer Scott Fitzgerald’s “The Great Gatsby.”

“You know, wasn’t it you who forcefully dumped Takeda on me? Furthermore, wasn’t it you who set up that strange mailbox in the school backyard?”

“I didn’t forcefully dump Takeda on you; I only recommended you to her. What I said was ‘If the writer is Konoha, your letters will be amazing. He’ll discuss the details with you.’ Also...”

Tooko’s skinny body leaned forward. As her chest moved forward her chair started to creak. Her bright red lips gave way of a smile. “Who said that the letters were written offhandedly during lunch breaks? I never said anything like that. Was it you?”

“Huh!”

I couldn't countered what she said. Tooko-senpai affectionately closed her eyes.

"Ah, Takeda's love should be going well! What kinds of reports will she write? Will it be a strawberry cake covered with fresh cream, or will it be an orange wine slightly added, a bit sour yet sweet chocolate cake? The layered taste of a fluffy sponge cake that has custard sauce spread all over it doesn't sound bad as well."

Her head has again filled with the idea of desserts. Perhaps she got hungry as she thought, Senpai started to gently tear the pages of 'The Great Gatsby' apart; she put the piece into her mouth one by one.

"Hm! So good. Fitzgerald's literature has such an extravagant taste. Pretense, pride, the feverish waltz, I can just taste the shiny caviar and champagne in a party. I put it into my mouth, a soft bite is that's all that's needed to diffuse the delicate layer of film; the rich scent of liquor swirls around my tongue. I really want to give the main character Gatsby my most sincere wishes."

That Gatsby's former lover Daisy is married to another man. Didn't Gatsby get dumped by Daisy many times, and he finally became disillusioned towards love? How could that have an "extravagant taste?" Shouldn't the taste be sour....forget it, each person has his own subjective sense towards literature...

"Ah!"

Tooko-senpai suddenly shouted. She sounded as if the end of the world were here.

Then her eyebrows became downcast, and she looked dejected.

"What should I do, this book belongs to the school library, and I ate it~~~~"

At the end, I accompanied Tooko-senpai to the library to apologize for the damaged book. We told the librarian that "we accidentally dropped the book." (I went with Tooko-senpai because she said she felt embarrassed apologizing alone, so she forced me to go as well.)

The following day, Takeda, as usual, ran to my classroom.

"How are things between you and Shuuji-senpai? Have you guys talked about starting a new relationship yet?"

We left the classroom together, and started to converse in the hallway.

"Wah, I never thought you would worry about me, thank you so much. Konoha-senpai is so caring!" [TL note: sincerely, not sarcastic]

I blushed. No, it's not like that...I asked because I don't want to write any more letters. If you two hurry up and become a pair, then I won't have to write anymore...

“Actually, thanks to the letters Konoha-senpai writes, the distance between Shuuji-senpai and I are closer than ever before. There is only just a tiny bit more to go, my feeling tells me that’s all that’s needed for this love to succeed.”

“Really? Then you'll have to take charge and pull him towards you!”

I encouraged her. Takeda seemed to deeply agree with me, and rapidly nodded her head.

“Yes, I will pull him even harder. I'm also upholding my part of the deal- I have started writing the report, look!”

As she said it, she happily showed me the notebook she was holding to her chest. The dimension of the notebook was only about half the size of a regular textbook. A yellow duck is printed on its cover. Even though she said she was bad at writing, she seemed motivated enough.

“It's a bit embarrassing, but I find recording things that happened to the person I love so cheering. But, if I just give this to Senpai to read, you will definitely think that I only record insignificant events. So I need to go over the whole thing again.”



“Well, since you seem all fired up, maybe you can write the love letters yourself?”

Takeda covered her face with her notebook, and shook her head.

“No, that’s too embarrassing. But, you’re right. I really do want to write my own letters. But before then, I’ll still have to depend on you, Konoha-senpai.”

Sigh, do I still remain as the writer of others’ love letters?

At this moment, Takeda suddenly looked at me uncomfortably.

The top part of her face that’s not hidden by the notebook seemed to have lost all its confidence.

“Hmm...Are you finding my requests troublesome?”

I secretly gasped.

“Why would I! That’s nonsense! I am very glad to be at your service to write love letters, ha ha ha.”

Again I hid what was on my mind.

Upon hearing what I said, a blissful smile appeared on Takeda’s face once again.

“That’s fantastic! Then, I’ll ask for your help tomorrow!”

She became energetic again. As she waved her hands, ready to trip at the same time, she happily took her leave.

Sigh, I really am a fake do-gooder.

As I returned to my classroom dejectedly, the male classmates all taunted me with lines like “your girlfriend comes to visit you every day” “you’ve already gotten yourself a freshman, I never knew you were that good.”

“What, things are not like what you all are imagining.”

As I chuckled, I tried to steer them away from this topic.

I don’t want to stand out too much, as that would irritate others. For me, the extra risk of being too noticeable is not worth the trouble. Even if the sky drops me a present, I still won’t just take it as if I deserved it. I’m just a normal person.

When I returned to my seat, I felt someone staring at me. I looked around, and there really was a student staring intensely at me.

She is Kotobuki Nanase.

Her hair, dyed brown, stands out from other classmates. Her facial features are all very well defined; she looks like a modern girl one would find in the rowdier part of a major city. She possesses a very straightforward way of talking. All these features make her quite a popular person in my class.

I often hear my fellow male classmates describe her as such- “Kotobuki-san’s temper is not the best in the world, but she is quite hot.”

I don’t think she likes me. I came to this conclusion because since the start of the school term in April, she always stares at me coldly.

I don't remember doing anything to her that could cause her to stare intensely at me. Ah, right, yesterday...

As I absentmindedly mused over the thought, Kotobuki-san sternly walked to my desk. She put out her right hand, and said to me crudely:

"Give me 460 yen."

"What?"

"It's the replacement price for the book that was 'accidentally dropped.' It's written in the school code, right? Those who damage or lose library books need to pay the replacement fee."

"But you said it was okay yesterday?"

Yesterday when I went with Tooko-senpai to apologize, the librarian that was manning the library's help desk was, quite unexpectedly, Kotobuki-san.

At that time I secretly swore at my luck. Why did the work schedule have to choose Kotobuki? Things won't be settled that easily then.

Even though Kotobuki had a stern face at that time, and her attitude could hardly be describe as friendly, she said-

"You didn't intentionally damage the book. This can't be help. Please be careful next time."

And just like that she let Tooko-senpai go.

But now she wants someone to pay for that 460yen? And that someone has to be me? The person who damaged (no, or should I say 'ate') the book was Tooko-senpai!

The moment I pointed out the fallacy in her reasoning to Kotobuki san, she raised her eyebrows, and crudely said-

"I can't just go and ask that Tooko Amano-senpai for the replacement fee. She's a very important supporter for the library. She knows better than anyone else where each book is placed at. In addition many student librarians have received her help one way or the other. When I was in first year, I was unfamiliar with the location of various books; however, thanks to Amano-senpai's help, I completed my tasks successfully. So, Inoue, pay up for Senpai."

"Hm, Kotobuki-san, don't you find your reasoning a bit illogical?"

"Absolutely not." (She replied with absolute certainty)

Wah, she replied without any hesitation. I don't like to get involved in arguments with other people, so I took out my wallet, put a 500 yen coin onto Kotobuki's outstretched palm, and then bowed down to her apologetically.

"My club president has troubled you. I apologize for her."

Kotobuki-san tightly clenched the coin, and held her lips high.

"I'll give you the change later on. If you tell Tooko-senpai any of this, I will beat you."

What is the world coming to? Why should I help clean up the mess Tooko-senpai leave behind?

I thought those were all the things Kotobuki-san wanted to say, but she continued to stand at the same place and glare at me.

"...hey, recently there's this first year girl who keeps on coming to see you. Are you in a relationship with her?"

"You mean Takeda? There's nothing between us."

"Really? That girl is also a student librarian, so I know her. She looks like an impressionable girl, the kind that pedophiles would probably go for. You two are really not in a relationship?"

'The kind that pedophiles would go for'...isn't that a bit harsh? But then again, if I talked back to her, she would get even madder.

So I just smiled and said-

"I was entrusted by Tooko-senpai to be Takeda's consultant."

And then, Kotobuki-san's eyebrows rose even higher. Now she looks furious.

Ah, damn. Did I say anything wrong again?

Kotobuki took a deep breath, and looked at me coldly-

"Forget it...what you do with your love life is none of my business. But, if you two are truly not together, then there is no need to intentionally lead her to the hallway or other deserted places to talk. Doing so would only make other people suspicious of your intentions."

After she said this jarring warning, she left my desk without looking back once.

Next class was Japanese History. I tried to copy down what the teacher wrote on the board onto my notebook, but my mind was elsewhere- I must hurry and bring Takeda and Shuuji-senpai together...

The thorny tone of Kotobuki, along with what she said, left a straining feeling in my mind.

Ahhh, what should I do? Should I just give in and write a supremely flirty love letter for Takeda?

As the class went on, grey thick clouds started to displace the clear blue sky. Raindrops started to land on the windows panels.

(It's starting to rain...I think I put my umbrella in a drawer in the Literary Club room...)



As I grew older, I became more and more aware that the difference and the gap between how I think and how others think was increasing. Things that sadden or pleased others, I do not feel anything. Not even a tiny bit of these events resonate with my emotion.

Why do others feel happy?

Why do others feel sad?

During track and field competitions or ball games, when everyone excitedly cheered for their teams; or a classmate was about to transfer schools, when everyone sadly said farewell to them, I would be like a linguistically challenged foreigner. I stood among others, and I felt unease spreading throughout my body. I would wane my body posture. My stomach would start to twist itself. Other people are talking non-stop, yet I know nothing of what they say.

One day, someone stuffed lit firecrackers into the mouth of the class's pet bunny. The bunny died horrendously. When the class found out about this, everyone were mourning for its death; I, instead, only felt extremely disquiet. I fixated my stare on my toes, and I shrunk my posture as much as possible.

Why am I not feeling anything from the death of the rabbit?

I tried to recall the cute images of the rabbit prior to its doom. I tried to imagine its soft fur. I laboriously attempted to cultivate the sorrowful emotions, yet my emotion remained as blank as ever. There is no way I can squeeze out even a single tear drop. I secretly looked around, and only I was not crying.

At that instance, I felt my whole neck turn fiercely red, and my ears started to ring. I felt extremely shameful and scared. Why? Why is everyone crying? Ah, I really don't

understand. But, if only I appear emotionless when everyone else is crying, others will find it strange, so I must make myself cry. But my face is so stiff that it is impossible. My face started to blush again. If others noticed I am only faking my sadness, what should I do? I cannot lift my head, not now. So I lowered my head even further, and put on a melancholic expression. Ah, this time everyone is laughing together. What is so funny about it? I really don't know. But, if I don't have the same reaction as others, they will label me as a queer, and I would have no friends.

Now is the time to laugh. I must laugh, and laugh. No, let's cry, and cry. No, the reaction for this should be laughter, I must react with laughter.

Ah, this ability appears straightforward to everyone else, yet I couldn't do it. I really am a queer, an oddball.

Because I am unable to have the same emotional response as others, my shame and my fear twist my stomach into knots. If everyone found out about this, they would look at me coldly.

Amongst a flock of white sheep, I feel like the peculiar black sheep.

I cannot experience the joy my companions can feel, or the sadness my companions can feel, or the hunger my companions can feel.

Alien to its companions' feelings of affection- love, kindness, empathy, and many others, all the tragic black sheep can do is covers its black fur with white powder, and pretends to be a white sheep.

If my companions found out I am just a black sheep, would they charge at me with their horns? Would they trample me with their hooves? I hope I never find out. Please don't let others find out my secret.

Whenever a raindrop landed on me, whenever a gust blew past me, would the white dust I sprayed onto my body fall off? Would someone yell "He is a black sheep!" I fear this. So fearful is my mind I could not even muster a trace of serenity. But if I don't do this, I would have no other ways.

In front of my parents, teachers, and classmates, I struggle to act and react politely. I act goofily, just to make others like me. Ah, I sincerely hope that no one will ever find out that I am a monster who lacks a human heart. I hope I can camouflage myself into a mere silly and idiotic clown, just to make others laugh with me, pity me, forgive me. And this can go on forever and ever and so will I.

Even now I am still wearing the mask, and playing the part of the clown.



“Wow, it’s raining pretty hard.”

It was right after school hours now, and I was walking in the dusky hallway.

The time was not very late, yet the sky outside the windows was dark. The sky was filled with grey clouds. The arrows of rain being fired at the ground let out a cold sound.

The air was moist, and chilly.

“Didn’t the weather forecast say that there is only 50% chance of precipitation?”

I hope the umbrella I placed in the club room is still there.

When it rained last week, at that time I opened the drawer only to find that the umbrella I placed there was gone.

“Ah, sorry. When it rained last week, I borrowed your umbrella, but I forgot to put it back.”

Tooko-senpai flatly said.

And so both of us ran back home, in the rain, without anything to shield us.

“Remember to put the umbrella back after you borrow it!”

“Okay! But see, the way we were running in the rain, don’t you feel like ‘Ahhh, this is youth?’”

(That Senpai, she keeps on treating other people’s things as her things, and her things still as her things...)

Is she Jaian? Maybe that’s also why I got forced to join the Literary Club?

(Hmmm...this is an unanswerable enigma.)

I am the student on class duty today. By the time I finished all the things the teacher asked me to do, the time was already quite late. Right now Tooko-senpai must be knocking on her chair, endlessly whining “So hungry.” There are many old books in the club classroom, but their conditions aren’t very good.

“If I eat these expired books, I will get stomach aches.”

Tooko-senpai once said.

“But, if the old books have been cared for properly, they must taste as delicious as ripen French Wine or Truffles. Ah, just imagining the taste of it makes me salivate! Also also, the original handwritten works of Natsume, Ogai, or Mushanokoujis in the Literary Museum! I don’t think there is anything else in this world that is as delicious as them! Even if I do get a stomach ache, I still want to have a bite.”

She looked serious when she said that. The image of Tooko-senpai sneaking into the Literary Museum appeared in my mind, and I became a bit concerned.

“Ah, darn. I forgot my history textbook.”

The History teacher Saeguki-sensei is very strict, and I have his class tomorrow; I figured I should study for it tonight. So I head back to the classroom.

Maybe because it’s raining, the deserted hallway seemed very quiet.

As I was about to reach out to the classroom door’s handle and open it, I heard voices coming out from inside the classroom. It sounded like there were female classmates causally chatting inside.

Because they were all girls, I hesitated whether I should just barge in. As I hesitated, I overheard what they are chatting about.

“Ehh, Eri is aiming for Akutagawa too. Really?”

“Uhh, doesn’t Mori -chan like Akutagawa as well? Then you two are love rivals.

“Wait a second. I like Akutagawa too. I think he is a very good person.”

“Ehhhhh. Miki too? Then there are three people.....?”

It seems like they are talking about which boys they like.

Of course, this ‘Akutagawa’ that is the subject of their discussion is not the literary giant ‘Akutagawa’ instead they are referring to a classmate of ours. That classmate Akutagawa is very tall, and is truly a man of few words. He looks quite mature and wise. You can tell just by looking that he is the type girls like.

But, I am troubled now. It is quite hard for me to just wander into the classroom when they are in the middle of a personal and intimate talk.

“Yay. I like Hirosaki, and I don’t have any love competitors~”

“What? Suzuno you like Hirosaki?”

“Hehe, I have a thing for the rebellious type of guys. In fact, this Saturday we are going to meet up in the Aquarium to watch the dolphins play.”

“Ehhhhh!”

“When did you two started going out!”

“It’s only been a month since we changed classes. Aren’t you a quick mover!”

“And to think that I’ve only got to the ‘Hello!’ and ‘Bye!’ stage with Akutagawa. Wait Suzuno! Next time we’re going to a sale, you’re treating me to ice cream!”

“Me too! And I don’t want single scoop, I want double scoops!”

“Wah, I need to buy new clothing for the date, so my budget is a bit tight this month. You two are only allowed to buy 50 yen ice cream.”

The cheerful sound of girls’ laughter was carried into my ears. They seem to be enjoying themselves very much.

Uhhh...maybe I should go to the club first, and then come back later.

“Then, next up is Nanase.”

“Yeah. Eve~ryone has confessed who they like. So now you need to ‘fess up to us as well.”

Nanase? Nanase Kotobuki-san? It appears that Kotobuki is in the classroom as well.

“Don’t tell us, Nanase likes Akutagawa as well?”

“Wahhhhhh, don’t let that be true. Nanase is very beautiful. I have no chance of winning against her.”

“I...”

From the other side of the door, I heard Kotobuki’s voice.

I knew eavesdropping is to be frowned upon, but I was also curious who that harsh and prideful Kotobuki likes. So I subconsciously held my breath and listen on.

“I don’t have any specific person I like. But I do have a person I hate...”

“Ehh, who?”

“Inoue Konoha”

Kotobuki-san plainly said my name.

My mind became blank all of a sudden. I couldn't think. Then I felt my whole head heat up.

"Ehh, why? Inoue-kun seems very nice. He doesn't seem the kind that would do things other people hate." "That's right. Doesn't he seem as harmless as air?" "His personality is a bit plain. But~~~~if you look at him closely, he actually looks pretty cute."

"Yeah. He always talks gently, and he smiles a lot."

Suddenly, Kotobuki became irritated and frustratedly said:

"This is why I find him disgusting. He keeps on showing that phony smile to everyone. No one can understand what he's actually thinking. The sight of him makes me sick."

From my face to my ears, I started to turn red. Even my hands started to shake. My throat started to hurt.

Why are you saying that about me? I know you don't like me. But why do you need to derogate me with such contempt in front of everyone?

I really just want to run away from the scene. But my pride won't let me; instead I reached out my hand, and pulled open the classroom door. As I walked in, all the girls turned around and noticed me.

I acted as if I didn't hear anything. I opened my eyes wide to act surprised.

"Eh? You all are staying behind? Sorry, did I interrupted something?"

All the girls looked flushed. I walked quickly to my desk, took out my history textbook, and put it into my backpack.

"I forgot to pack my textbook. I'll need it for tomorrow~"

Kotobuki became furiously red and stared at me. I intentionally looked at her, and tried my hardest to put on a smile.

"Then, bye."

The female students hurriedly answered with sounds resembling "b-bye."

Only Kotobuki-san, who raised her chin and tightly closed her lips, stared intensely at me.

(I am bitter, and ashamed)

In the damp and dark hallway, I dragged myself through it with a wretched mind.

(‘He keeps on showing that phony smile to everyone. No one can understand what he's actually thinking. The sight of him makes me sick.’)

Compared to those who only think for themselves, those who keep on getting into conflicts with others, those who keep on ruining the mood for the sole purpose of expressing their own opinions, isn't it better just to be quiet and just go along with whatever other people have in mind?

Sometimes this is the only way to get along with others.

But why, why do you have to describe me as ‘disgusting’?

(It's not like I was born to like laughing hollowly!)

Something intensely hot suddenly rushed up from my throat. I wanted to scream-

(I wasn't like that before! Before that happened I...)

-----Konoha, you always laugh so cheerfully~.

-----And, when you are annoyed, when you are mad, when you are anxious, all these emotions just flow out and surface on your face. It's so easy to understand you. You are like a little puppy, so cute and simple.

So mean, I am not a little puppy! Whenever I countered her, she always covered her mouth with her hand and let out a ringing, bell-like, pleasing laugh.

-----See, you are annoyed again. You are so easy to see through. But, that's what I like about you. Whenever Konoha is near me, I feel at ease.

(When I was in junior high, I had a girl I loved. I, like everyone else, had been involved in a love relationship.)

Whenever I heard her voice, my heartbeat would rise. Every line she said to me, they were the special treasures heaven granted me. I put all of them into the deepest part of my heart. Every night before I went to sleep, I would take these presents out and admire them.

And just like this, everyday of my live was blissful. I always had a true smile on my face.

But my love, just like Gatsby's from “The Great Gatsby”, had a ruinous ending. And then I learnt to lie.



I tried my best to play the part of a ‘human’, and played it well.

Everyone around me described me as optimistic, cheerful, and gentle.

Whenever someone derogated me or mocked me, I didn’t care- in fact I felt light-hearted. But whenever someone said I am empathic and gentle, my stomach would start to spasm, I would feel very bad.

Whenever I hunger for other people's acceptance, I would act silly and make everyone laugh, or I would fake my love for puppies; In reality I was so ashamed, my face feels like it is on fire.

Why do I say that? Because everything is fake. They are only the products of my imitations. Because I am not what others say I am, a gentle and empathic soul. These are just parts of my scam.

Therefore, whenever someone complimented me, I have the urge to scream “Ahhgg!”, even to the point of having the impulse of getting a knife and stabbing myself to death.

Katsutou [TL note: probably the name of his dog] doesn’t know about any of my internal conflicts. Whenever I pat its head, it would wag its tail and inch over to me. It too must have thought I am a gentle and empathic human.

The girl who told me that she likes me, is every bit as innocent as the dog.

She is a pure and positive girl. She always laughs without worries, just like a little kid.

How great would it be, if I were like her.

But, to such a peaceful and innocent girl, I too despise her with all my being.



Tooko-senpai had put her short-socks wearing, bent legs on the chair she was sitting on. As she listened to the rain outside, both of her hands were holding up a book to read.

Today her snack was a lavishly decorated hard cover copy of the “Iliad”. This is an epic poem by the great blind poet Homer that describes the Trojan War of Troy.

Her shiny, cat-tail-like, black French braids extended all the way to her waist. The image of long and organized eyebrows softly casted themselves onto her pupils. Her slender index finger gently caressed her lips. This was a strange hobby Tooko-senpai did when she read. Sometimes she would even suck on her index finger.

The raindrops had wet the dirt-covered window panels. There was no sight of the sunshine from the sunset.

I stopped writing the composition, and asked Tooko-senpai:

“Tooko-senpai, do you have someone you like?”

“What? What did you say?”

Whenever Tooko-senpai concentrates on her readings, she often comes oblivious to sounds around her.

“Ah, is the snack done?”

Suddenly a brilliant shine appeared on Tooko’s face. Only this topic can divert the attention of the concentrating Senpai. One could say it was part of her essence of being.

“I’m asking you, do you have someone you like?”

“Of course. Let’s see, Gallico, Dickens, Dumas, Stendhal, Chekhov, Shakespeare, Alcott, Montgomery, Farjeon, Lindgren, MacLachlan, Cartland, Jordan, Ihara Saikaku, Natsume Souseki, Mori Ougai, Miyagiwa Kenji, and Kimura Yuuichi are some of the people I like. Also there are...”

The sight of Senpai starting to salivate as she lists more and more authors is a bit too much for me. I hurriedly cut her off.

“I am not asking what your favourite food is. Furthermore, who are Cartland and Jordan? The basketball player?”

“Gosh, you don’t know Barbara Cartland and Penny Jordan? They are both famous Romance novelists. You must read Cartland’s ‘The Flame is Love’, a story about a daughter of an American oil tycoon who hid her own identity while falling in love with a rich handsome guy.

Jordan's 'Silver' was adapted as a manga series. I too wholeheartedly recommend this book. The book is about an innocent girl called Geraldine, who was betrayed by the person she loved. She was in so much distress that her black hair turned silver in one night. So she decided to seek revenge. For that, she found a handsome love instructor to provide her with love expertise and tutors. It was a course filled with thi~~~~ck and sweet love to the rim. That instructor is so sexy, so perfect that he is unbeatable."

Ah ah, we are getting more and more off topic.

"I know. Say no more. I am not asking you about that.....Tooko-senpai, have you ever been in love?"

"Eh?"

Tokoo Senpai tilts her head and looks confused.

"Carp?" [TL note: In Japanese, the word 'love' (戀, koi) has the same pronunciation as 'carp' (鯉)]

"Not the edible koi. It's the love koi. L-O-V-E."

"I am always in love with food."

"As I said I am not asking about what food you love. I am asking have you ever fallen in love with another human being." I don't know why, but I suddenly feel tired. No matter how miserable I feel, I am a moron for attempting to converse with this person on the subject of love.

When I finished my sentence, Tooko-senpai put on a faraway expression and quietly smiled.

What the. It's like someone was playing the theme song of a hardboiled drama movie [TL: I don't know what this means], the mood in the room changed to solemn and serious. Don't tell me Tooko-senpai had some painful experiences with love?

"I...am in a love Daisatsukai ."[TL note: 大殺界('big kill dimension') is a reading of a type of Chinese Astrology (六星占術, Rokusei Senjutsu, 'six-star astrology')). Daisatsukai is the worst reading you can get.]

"Ha? What does that mean?"

I had expected something unexpected, and yet at the end I still got startled. I raise my voice and asked.

Tooko-senpai kept on staring at the rain-washed window panel with a dreamy expression appearing in her eyes. She, with a sad tone, said-

“At the beginning of this year, I went to ShinXXXX’s Mother [TL note: 新宿の母, A very famous Japanese fortune teller in, where else, Shinjuku. Censored for trademark reasons)] to have my love fortune told. And she said ‘you have the love daisatsukai since you were born. Even if you try to have a relationship, it will 100% end in failure. So, don’t waste your time on love, concentrate your attentions on something else like academic work or a hobby.’”

“ShinXXXX’s Mother, you mean the one who set up a stand at the corner of the IXXtan Department Store [株式会社伊勢丹(Isetan), a large department store], the one that always has many people lining up to have their fortunes read? You went to line up as well?”

“Yes. And it snowed hard that day. It was so cold.”

“Why did you choose to go when it was snowing?”

“I thought that there would be no one waiting if it was snowing. Indeed, I only waited thirty minutes before it was my turn.”

My head started to hurt again.

“You really wanted ShinXXX’s Mother to tell your love fortune?”

“I really am a girl, of course I care about my love fortune. And to think that all I got was the love daisatsukai...gosh. But, the sensei said that the curse will end in seven years. And then I would finally meet my man of destiny.”

After she said that, incredibly, Senpai changed from a hardboiled expression to a blissful expression. She even moved her upper body towards me and said:

“‘In the summer seven years from now, in front of a bear that has a carp in its mouth, you will fall in love with a man in a white scarf. He will be your destined lover. Your love line [TL: windows of love period in one’s life] is very short, so this is your only chance in you life. I recommend that you must do what you can to succeed.’ I was actually quite disappointed by this; I mean you have to wait seven years.”

“Why would the man be wearing a scarf in summer? Furthermore, you would probably get eaten by the bear before you two fall in love.”

Upon hearing that, Tooko-senpai puffed her cheek and became annoyed.

“Konoha-kun can't fantasize at all.”

“Or rather, you fantasize too much.”

“That’s why I am the Literary Shoujo.”

“Please don’t use that as the excuse for everything. Gosh, forget it. Sorry for interrupting your readings.”

A look of puzzlement appeared on Tooko-senpai’s face.

“Hmm...did something happen? Konoha-kun?”

“Nothing...”

“Do you...have someone...you like?”

I moved my face away.

As the raindrops landed on the window panels, they gave out knocking sounds.

“I don’t have anyone I like. No one, no nothing. This is for the best...”

Nothing will happen.

Fall in love with no one.

No pain, sorrow, nor despair, and I will live normally forever.

I pray to myself every day that this is true.

I think I will never fall in love in my life.

“...”

Tooko-senpai silently stared at me.

A year ago, when I was forced to join the Literary Club, Tooko-senpai also had that sorrowful expression on her face. That childish Tooko-senpai could also have these kinds of expressions; my mind was filled with shame and remorse for making her sad.

“Sorry, I’ll call it a day and go home.”

I couldn’t stand the awkward silent mood. So I put the finished compositions on the table and stood up.

I opened the rusty drawer, and sure enough, the umbrella that should be there was gone.

“Take it.”

Tooko-senpai handed me a light purple collapsible umbrella and smiled.

“I borrowed your umbrella, so use mine for today.”

“Tooko-senpai, why?”

“Nothing in particular. I just want to use the long umbrella.”

“...is that right. I will be using yours then.”

“Sure. See you tomorrow. Bye bye.”

Tooko-senpai was still smiling as she waved goodbye to me.

I walked down the staircase and opened the umbrella. In the raining sky of grey, the purple flower, with a bang, blossomed completely.

Purple is Tooko-senpai's favourite color. I often see her with small items like a purple handkerchief or an automatic pencil.

“The rain...doesn't look like it's going to stop.”

I hold up my umbrella, and stood motionlessly.

I am probably holding the only umbrella she has.

I know Tooko-senpai lied to me.

After I became a high school student, whenever I faced my classmates, I always had a mask on my face. I intentionally kept my distance with them. Even when I laughed with them, the laughs were not real. When Kotobuki-san criticize me for this, I only felt disquiet; but when I face Tooko-senpai, the real me always come out.

Whenever I see Tooko-senpai perplexed or sad, I would think to myself ‘Even if it's fake, I should still always smile for her.’ Yet every time I'm in front of her, I find it hard to smoothly change my tone and expression. How pitiful.

What should I do? How do I improve my lying skills?

After I improve my lies, then none of us will be hurt.

I looked at the dripping cold rain, and tried to guess how long Tooko-senpai needs to wait before she can go home.

At the other end of the school complex, a uniformed girl student came out.

(It's Takeda-san)

She noticed me as well, so she stopped her steps.

She took a deep breath, and opened her eyes wide.

With a coarse voice, she mutters “Shuuji...senpai.”

Eh?

Right after that, Takeda san kneeled down and started crying.

“What happened, Takeda-san?”

Takeda-san didn’t answer. Instead she put her wet body and face onto my chest. She wrapped her arms around my back and started crying again. She looked very painful, with her eyes closed, and her endless stream of tears.

As I was holding my bag and the umbrella, I couldn’t embrace her back. Also, this was the first time I experienced this kind of event, so I was at a loss as to what to do. What happened with Shuuji-senpai? Just as I was about to ask her-

“Chii!”

A boy who was around my age called for her.

Suddenly, the kneeled down Takeda-san shuddered once in my chest.

“Chii?”

The voice was from the direction that Takeda came from, and it was getting closer. The voice was filled with puzzlement. Suddenly Takeda-san grabbed my wrist.

“Ta, Takeda-san... wait!”

Takeda-san tightly gritted her teeth together, and looked bewildered. She pulled on my wrist and started dragging me away.

“Takeda-san, he's calling for ‘Chii’. Is he calling for you? That person, is he trying to find Takeda-san?”

“No, I can’t answer.” [TL note: or “I can’t answer him.” ie. I can’t let him find me]

Takeda-san frightenedly said. So just like this, she dragged me into the building.

In the split second as we entered the building, I saw a navy blue umbrella-holding boy looking around and coming in our general direction. But since the timing was too short, I didn’t see his face; I couldn’t identify who he was.

When we arrived at the school courtyard, Takeda-san finally let go of my wrist. Then she kneeled down and, with shaking shoulders, started crying again.



I said to that girl, we can try going out.

That girl, just like a little puppy, showed an innocent smile.

She has complete untainted trust in me. She entrusts her everything to me.

She is just a naïve, pure, kind hearted, positive, white sheep that is blessed and loved by god.

A girl like her, makes me fill with jealousy and contempt. At the same time, I couldn't stop my longing for her pureness.

Perhaps, maybe, just maybe, this child, can change my being.

People often say, love can change a person.

Perhaps this girl can save me from my destruction.

Maybe from now on, I will no longer be a loveless, apathetic monster. I will become a real human.

Ahh, please, please I am begging you, please let that taintless ray of light save me.

But, if she ever found out that I have killed a person before, would she still love me? Would she still find me a gentle and empathetic person?

I am a monster.

On that day, the soft flesh was crushed. From it the sweet and sour scent of red blood spread out on the pitch black asphalt road. I, with my hollow heart, stared hollowly at the scene.

I killed a person.

Bungaku Shoujo: Volume1 Chapter3

Chapter 3 The First Handnote- Shuuji Kataoka's Confession

“Shuuji-senpai...”

That's what Takeda-san called me.

Takeda-san didn't tell me why she was crying.

I waited until Takeda-san stopped crying, then I accompanied her back to her house. We both shared a single purple umbrella as we slowly walked home. Because Takeda-san had been crying very hard, her eyes became very red, and she kept her head low the whole way. I tried to discreetly note her condition, and I noticed that her lips were a bit swollen, with blood seeping out. Sometimes she would secretly raise her head to look at me, and a feeling of unsure (or unsecure) would show in her hazes, as if she was trying to ascertain something. Then she would nervously lower her head, and blink a few times.

Pretty soon we arrived at a 2 story high building that is surrounded by beautiful flowerbeds. We said goodbye to one another.

“Thank you for walking me home, senpai.”

“No problem. You should hurry up and change your clothes. That will make you warmer.”

Takeda-san raised her head and looked at me. She kept on staring at me as if there was something written on my face. Then her eyes became tear-filled again, and she lowered her head. After she bid me farewell, she turned around to the front entry that was decorated with a handmade door sign, and slowly disappeared inside.

On the following day during the break after the first period, Takeda-san didn't come to find me. I remained stationed in my seat, and I stared at the classroom door throughout the whole period. Because of this, I accidentally made eye contact with Kotobuki-san, who was just about to enter the classroom.

(Wah, what should I do.)

The other side seemed to panic at well. She became motionless at the door. But then she bit her lip, and with some hesitation, walked towards me.

“This is the change you wanted yesterday.”

After she said that, she curtly extended her fist towards me.

“Ahhh, thanks....eh, 50 yen?”

Kotobuki-san had put a 50 yen coin onto my hand.

“That’s....10 yen extra.”

“I know that. So give me 10 yen in return.”

“Ehhh.....Sorry. I don’t have any change with me right now.”

“Then give it to me at a later date.”

She mumbled resentfully. She seemed ready to leave, yet she remained beside my desk.

“...Today, Takeda Chia didn’t come.”

“Ahh...yeah. That’s right.”

“Hey, yesterday after school...Inoue, you walked straight into the classroom, right? At that moment...you really didn’t hear anything?”

As she said that, she gazed fixedly at me.

I put on a gentle smile.

“Eh? Hear what?”

Kotobuki-san turned red instantly.

“You didn’t hear anything...that’s good.”

She concluded the conversation with this, turned around, and walked back to her seat.

All that’s left is the 50 yen coin in my palm.

The school bell started to ring softly, signifying that period two was about to begin.

(Aah, Takeda-san....she really didn’t come.)

The time is after the second period, and Takeda-san is still nowhere in sight.

I was worried that she got a cold and was absent, so I decided to find her. As I was wandering back and forth near her classroom door, I saw her. She, and her friends, were giggling and laughing as they came out of the classroom.

“Hurray! Yotsu-chan you are amazing! Ok! I too will wait until it’s his birthday, and I will bake him a birthday cake as well. Ah.”

The cheerful looking Takeda-san noticed me. She widened her eyes, and she put her hand down.

“Konoha-senpai...”

“Goo-Good morning.”

“Gosh, why did you come here without telling me, senpai? Ah, sorry, Yotsu-chan, I will be going first. Konoha-senpai, here here”

Takeda-san grabbed my wrist, and with skipping steps, she walked forward.

(Ah, what? How did she become so lively all of a sudden?)

She took the puzzled me to a deserted place, turned around and smiled at me.

“Ehh, I didn’t think that Konoha-senpai would come looking for me, I was very surprised.”

“Well, since you were crying so hard yesterday, I was worried.”

“Ah, about that? I am fine already. Maybe my mind just became a bit too tense, or maybe the rain made me depressed...or it’s because Konoha-senpai is too kind...I couldn’t help but play darling with you [TR note: I don’t know how to translate this phrase properly, could someone help formulate a better one?]....kyaa, that was so embarrassing. Please forget what happened yesterday.”

With her face blushing furiously, and the way she waved her arms as she talked, she looked like the Takeda from any other day. I couldn’t help but doubt myself- was that crying face of hers a mere hallucination?

“Did something happen between you and Shuuji-senpai?”

The boy that was looking for Takeda, was he Shuuji-senpai? After all, he did call Takeda-san with the intimate nickname ‘Chi’...

Takeda-san’s expression quickly became clouded.

Ahh, something did happen.

“...That...something is bothering Shuuji-senpai. Yesterday, I got Shuuji-senpai's letter, the letter says...”

Letter?

“Ah! But! I feel energetic now~~~”

Takeda san lifted her head and forced herself to smile at me.

“Right! Konoha-senpai. Have you brought today’s letter?”

“Yeah. I brought it.”

I handed her the neatly folded report paper, and she seemed to cheer up from the inside out.

“Thank you so much! I think after Shuuji-senpai reads the letter, he too will become energetic again. Ah, my next class is in a different classroom, I will be leaving then. Kyaa!”

Takeda-san tripped and almost fell, but thankfully I steadied her before she reached the ground.

“Ehehe, sorry. I am really clumsy. Bye!”

She once again stepped out her unsteady steps, and with a rhythmic ‘patapata’ noise [TR: onomatopoeia], she ran away again. Even though I am still concerned about her, all I did was see her off.

Shuuji-senpai has something bothering him in his mind, that’s what Takeda-san said.

Takeda-san was crying quite severely, these two events are probably related.

That Shuuji Kataoka, what kind of a person is he? Up to this point, I have written many letters to him already, but all I know about him are words I heard from Takeda-san.

As a 3rd year member of the Archery Club, he has many friends. He is good at acting silly and makes everyone laugh.

He always has an outgoing smile on his face. Only when he is practicing archery would he have a serious expression.

Even without talking with him, you would know he is very gentle. After you talk with him, you will realize he is also kind and empathic...

These are the things Takeda-san said.

What if Shuuji-senpai is not the kind of person Takeda thought he is? It is common to hear stories about a person who has his judgment clouded by his emotions.

“Hey, Akutagawa-kun, are you in the Archery club?”

During the cleanup duty time of the same day, I chatted with my classmate Akutagawa-kun.

“Yes.”

Right now Akutagawa-kun is carrying the table. He answered emotionlessly with an adult-like deep voice.

He is not mad at my intrusion; he has always been very economic with his words. I have never seen him laugh loudly. With his cool look, he probably is very popular with the girls. When I walked to his side and lifted my head to look at him, I found that he was completely different from me. He is very tall, his arms and his shoulders are very strongly-built, and his face is also very cool looking. He really is a handsome fellow.

“Among the third years in the Archery Club, is there a student called Shuuji Kataoka?”

Akutagawa thought about this a bit, and impassively answered-

“No, I do not know.”

“Eh? What? Did I make a mistake with the name? Is there a person that has nicknames like ‘Suu-chan’ or ‘Kajuu senpai’?”

“There is someone name Fujimura Shuuya in the club, but he is in 2nd year, not 3rd year. Also, I don’t think anyone calls him ‘Suu chan’ or ‘Kajuu senpai’.”

“Eeh, really? Is there anyone else with the name Suu?”

“I don’t recall.”

What is going on? Did Takeda-san make a mistake with the name? But, this explanation would only work before she confesses; she confessed already, they even write letters to one another, they probably talked a lot as well. I suppose it is possible that she misremembered the name.

Akutagawa finally finished moving the tables. He turned towards me.

“That Shuuji-senpai you mentioned, what happened?”

“Let’s see... I heard about him from someone I know. Then, is it all right if I accompany you to the club room for a drop in?”

“Ah. Sometimes we have students who are interested in joining dropping in to our practice sessions.”

“Then, is today fine with you? But I don’t plan on joining the club...can I still drop in?”

“.....It should be fine. I will notify the club teacher.”

“Thanks, Akutagawa-kun.”

The practice range for the archery club is the old dojo beside the gymnasium. At the front there are five target boards. In addition, there are a few targets that are made of hay. Each haystack has a pole sticking through it, with a board behind it as support. A few worn tatami were laid side by side.

Some club members are wearing white clothing with breast plates for the top and black hakama for the bottom. They are all currently practicing archery. Standing beside them are the remaining club members. There are about 10 of them; each person is wearing their PE uniforms, and holds a few chunky rubber arrows. Everywhere there are shouts of “Ashibumi!” “Dozukuri!” “Yugamae~!” They are probably first year students.

Akutagawa-kun has also changed into his practice uniform. He walked towards me and said-

“I got the permit. Don’t wander off; it could be dangerous here.”

“Ok, got it.”

At the moment, a loud snap pierced through my ears- an arrow had hit a tatami.

“Uwaa...the sound is so loud. It is pretty intense when you are near.”

Takeda-san once said that when Shuuji-senpai’s arrow hit its target, it felt as if her heart had been hit at the same time.

“Yeah...that’s right. Most people are surprised when they first experience it.”

Akutagawa-kun said emotionlessly. Afterwards, because he also had to practice, he had taken leave.

I just stood behind everyone and observed their practice.

The male and female members of the archery club all practice together. The division is about half and half. There are numerous members, just from looking there are about 50 people.

One of them must be Takeda-san’s love at first sight person, ‘Shuuji-senpai’.

(Unn...if it is love at first sight, then he must be very good looking. If that's the case, that person won't be him. Not him either. That person doesn't seem to match the description either....)

As the verification went on I put my head in my hands.

I was confused. The number of possible candidates was decreasing drastically.

(If I have to pick the best looking guy in the club, no matter how I look at it, Akutagawa-kun is the winner. But Takeda-san said that Shuuji-senpai differs from his serious look- he is very friendly, and socializes with many people. Akutagawa-kun could hardly be described as friendly...people from our class even described him as cold. What if he becomes lively when he comes to the club? Uhnn...uhnnn.....)

At the end, I failed to identify Shuuji-senpai.

During a break in the practice, Akutagawa-kun came to me and said in a low and passive vice-

“I asked the club president whether there is a member called Shuuji, but he said he doesn't know.”

The mystery mystified.

I thanked Akutagawa-kun and headed towards the literature club.

“Ku-shun~”

The sound of a cute sneeze entered my ears as I walked into the club room.

“Ku-shun~ Gusu....zuzu....”

Tooko-senpai pulled a Kleenex from the tissue box, and wiped her nose.

“Ah, good afternoon, Konoha-kun. Ku-shu~!”

She sneezed, and then wiped her nose.

The waste bin next to her feet was filled with pink used Kleenex.

Ah~~, she really got a cold from being soaked in the rain.

“This...umbrella, thanks.”

I handed her the purple umbrella. Tooko-senpai, with her Rudolf-like red nose and teary eyes, smiled at me.

“No problem. I put your umbrella back into the drawer. Thanks for letting me keep it for so long.”

“You seem to have a cold...are you all right?”

“No worries, no worries. Yesterday in the bath I was reading Cartland’s ‘The Haunted Heart’

I was so into it that I didn’t notice that the bath water had turned cold. But don’t worry, I will be fine soon.”

“If the bath water turned cold, you should have gotten out. Moreover, wouldn’t the book become wet and damp?”

“That’s why it is another kind of delicacy. It is as if you are dipping biscuits into pink red champagne, right?”

“I don’t think there exists a soap or shampoo flavored champagne.”

“Gosh, you really have no dreams. Ku-shun~...zuzu...But Konoha-kun, you are late today. Was it your turn to be on cleaning duty again?”

“That...I was not on duty. I went to the Archery Club to observe.”

“Zuzuz...guzu...the Archery Club?”

Tooko-senpai covered her face with her nose, tilted her head, and looked at me. Her braids, like cat tails, softly dangled on her back.

“Here’s what happened...”

I told her about yesterday’s incident with the crying Takeda-san, and how I failed to find Shuuji-senpai in the Archery Club today.

“What...”

Tooko-senpai was speechless.

Then, as she thought about what that meant, she said-

“The computer in the library should have a complete list of students’ names. Let’s go to the library.”

Kotobuki was manning the library’s circulation desk.

“Ah”

After she saw me, she started staring at me as if demanding what I was doing here.

“Kotobuki-san, could I use the computer?”

“Only a few people are using the computers today, the computers are not occupied.”

“Thank you.”

“Ku-shun. Sorry.”

We passed through the help desk and headed to the computer section. We picked an empty station.

“Konoha-kun, please do it. I am not very compatible with machines.”

Tooko-senpai’s voice was filled with dread.

“Compatible...All we are doing is searching!”

Using the mouse, I opened Sejiou School’s name list, and started to search for ‘Shuuji Kataoka’. The mouse cursor momentarily changed to an hourglass and then a warning saying ‘Record not found’ appeared.

Then, I searched for the name ‘Shuuji’.

That failed as well.

Then I searched for the name ‘Kataoka’. Seven records were returned. Four of them are female, and of the remaining 3, none of the males have the first name ‘Shuuji’. Not even a name that sounds remotely close.

Tooko-senpai and I turned and looked at each other.

What’s going on?

Not only does the person Shuuji Kataoka not exist in the Archery Club, he does not exist in this school.

The next day, during the break after the first period, Takeda-san appeared in my classroom. She held the notebook, with a duck printed on its cover, to her chest.

“Good Mor--ning~~, Konoha-senpai. I am here to get the letters.”

While ignoring Kotobuki-san’s stare, I dragged Takeda-san to the corner of the hallway.

“There is no letter today.”

“Eh, why?”

“Shuuji-senpai does not exist in this school.”

“Eeeeeeeeh”

Takeda-san’s eyes opened wide. She did not seem to be acting, she genuinely seemed to be shocked. Then, with a laugh, she amusingly said-

“Gosh, what are you talking about, Konoha-senpai. Of course Shuuji-senpai exists in this school!”

“But I couldn’t find a person named Shuuji Kataoka in the Archery Club, nor could I find him in the school student list. Takeda-san, who have you been giving the letters to?”

Takeda-san still cheerfully answered me-

“To Shuuji Senpai!”

Her expression and voice showed that she was not at all bothered by my question. So much so that I was starting to think that perhaps I had made a mistake. A feeling of unease swelled up inside me.

“Shuuji-senpai is rea~~~~~lly in the Archery Club!”

“Bu-But...”

“Chia always keeps Shuuji-senpai’s letters with her all the time. Here.”[TL note: note that Chia is talking about herself in third person term, as is common in Japanese for people to act cute (Why yes I am a cynic. Why did you ask?)]

Takeda-san opened the duck notebook she has been holding with her arms. She took out one of the envelopes inside it and showed it to me. The white envelope was of a simple design. There was no receiver’s name. All that was written on it were the words ‘From: Kataoka Shuuji’. Takeda-san then took out the letter in it.

The letter was a simple piece of white paper as well. There seemed to be three pieces of paper folded together.

Now that I noticed it, yesterday Takeda-san also mentioned about the letters Shuuji gave her. At that time she only said ‘The letter is...’, and then she became dispirited and fell silent.

She also said that something was bothering Shuuji-senpai.

The letter was probably about that, right?

Takeda-san's expression seemed a bit hesitant. With a look of unease I occasionally see from her, she looked at me. Then, as if she had made a decision, she held the letters out to me.

“Konoha-senpai. It's true. I haven't made a mistake. Please read the letter. Shuuji-senpai is...in despair right now....but I am an idiot; I couldn't understand...so...so...please, Konoha-senpai, please help him.”

With a shaken voice, she sincerely confessed to me. Even though on the outside she seems very outgoing; perhaps inside her stress level has already reached what she could handle by herself. Perhaps Takeda-san too is seeking someone to help her. Maybe that's why right now she is looking at me feebly.

I knew, after I read the letter, I would not be able to back out.

Right now, the act of reading the letter is only for the purpose of assisting and helping Takeda-san. I only want to help her. Nothing more.

To be able to live a quiet and eventless life is my biggest wish.

Sticking into other people's problems is a very foolish action. Sorry, I am not a person who can handle such a heavy burden. This is what I should have said to her. I should have said that, turned around, and left.

But that too seems to be too late. Does Shuuji Kataoka truly exist?Why is this happening? Even I want to know the answer to this.

I accepted the letter and opened it. The tips of my fingers were numbed. I could even smell a sweet scent.

“Mine has been a life of much shame.

On me, one could not find a trait that makes a human human.

Such as kindness, empathy, sympathy- emotions that a human should have.”

“I am wearing the mask of a clown. I killed myself trying to make those around me laugh, hoping that no one thinks that I am harmful. But, as the lies piled on top of one another, my heart became emptier and emptier.

“On that day, I killed a man. The soft flesh was crushed. From it the sweet and sour scent of red blood spread out on the pitch black asphalt road. I, with my hollow heart, stared at the scene.

I killed a man.

Perhaps even God does not want to save me.”

“It’s ‘Ningen Shikkaku’

After school I went to Literature Club room.

After Tooko-senpai read the letter, she unequivocally said.

“‘Ningen Shikkaku’, it’s by Dazai Osamu, right?”

“Yes. The line ‘Mine has been a life of much shame’ is what the main character of ‘Ningen Shikkaku’ said in the first line of the novel. Also, other sentences seemed to refer to ‘Ningen Shikkaku’ as well.”

After Tooko-senpai said that, ‘Ku-shu’, she sneezed again.

After a night of rest she got better, but she hasn’t healed completely yet. Her eyes keep on rolling around. “In other words, the event described in the letter did not really happen; it was only an imitation of the novel?”

I hope such is the case. When I received the letter from Takeda-san’s hands and read it, the content seemed very twisted and beyond help. I felt that I had been tossed into a truly black abyss.

This is the grim confession and repentance of a boy named Shuuji Kataoka.

Since he was small, Shuuji lacked the emotional traits others possessed.

Why would one feel happy?

Why would one feel dislike?

And, what’s the definition of like? What’s the definition of dislike?

A close relative of his died. At the funeral, everyone was crying. But he didn’t feel sad at all. A friend was going to move away, everyone was feeling bad. Except for him. When a puppy and a little baby appeared, everyone said it is so cute. Only he failed to comprehend, why do they like

such humans or animals. As these kinds of events happened more and more, he started to lose a sense of humanity, instead he felt that he was a cursed monster.

The failure of understanding other people's emotional processes made him feel fear, despair, and pain.

If everyone found out that he was a monster, what would they do?

Because of fear, he remains a clown. A clown that does his best to cheer up others. A clown that tries his hardest to make others like him.

Those around him were fooled by his acting. He naturally became a popular person in his social circle. But deep inside him, he was clenched by a powerful sense of shame. This brought immense pain to him.

Lying is shameful. Deviancy is also shameful. In his letter Shuuji Kataoka repeatedly described his inner pain.

“So ashamed.

I feel so ashamed.

Just the act of living brings me shame.”

Only one person saw through Shuuji’s clown trick.

Shuuji referred to that person as S. In the letter, he said that person understands him the best, yet at the same time it will be S who brings Shuuji to his destruction.

“Only one person, only S, through his intelligent eyes, made me realize I am merely a clown.”

“One day, S will cause me to go on the path of destruction.”

“One day, S quietly said to me. Your girlfriend, do you honestly love her?”

The letter ended here.

Who is ‘her’ the letter referred to? Who is ‘S’? I have no idea.

What kind of answer did Shuuji give S?

When I finished the letter, for some reason my chest felt very stuffed. I have felt like this before. After hearing what Tooko-senpai said, however, I felt relieved.

(This is the reason. This letter started with a reference to ‘Ningen Shikkaku’.)

When I was in junior high, I read this most notable work of Dazai Osamu. My first impression of the book is that the name is very dark. The reason I chose to read the book is because it was one of the 4 assigned readings for the summer holiday. After I picked a book, I was supposed to read it and write a report on it. Perhaps I was at an age of wanting to grow up, I picked the hardest book to read.

But back then I was only a junior high school student, I was not mature enough yet. So I didn’t really understand the pain the main character went through. The main character keeps on confessing for his melancholic life, but I didn’t get it one bit. At the end I chose another book for my report.

Even that was a very long time ago, but deep in my mind I still seem to recall the content of the book. So when I read Shuuji Kataoka’s letter, I had a deja vu moment with it.

“Ku-shu~”

Tooko-senpai has started sneezing again.



“Uhhnn... In my opinion this letter did not completely copy Dazai’s book. The author is only using ‘Ningen Shikkaku’ as a vehicle to express his feelings so that others can know his true self, I think.”

“If that’s the case, he said he killed a person, could this be true? And he said he wants to die, that’s true as well?”

“If he really did kill someone, then things are very bad.”

No matter how you put it, Shuuji Kataoka does not merely ‘have a little something bothering him.’ I must help him as soon as possible. The killing part may only be a delusion, but the act of

fantasizing such a thing is already dangerous enough. Moreover, for someone who is in so much despair, so much self-disdain, how could he live on?

“Dazai Osamu committed suicide a month after he completed ‘Ningen Shikkaku’. Looking at this, things do not look good.”

This letter feels almost as if it is a will. Shuuji Kataoka must be planning to commit suicide; that’s why he wrote such a letter to Takeda-san, right?

Tooko-senpai is sitting in her chair, both arms hugging her knees. Her right thumb is pushing on her lips as she falls into deep thought.

“Dazai Osamu’s ‘Ningen Shikkaku’ is composed of ‘Prologue’, ‘The First Handnote’, ‘The Second Handnote’, ‘The Third Handnote’, and finally ‘Epilogue’. It was published in June, July, and August editions of ‘Tenbou’. The beginning of the story, ‘Prologue’, and the confession of the main character ‘Youzou during his teen’, ‘The First Handnote’, were published in the May edition. A month later, on June 13th, Dazai Osamu, with his lover, Yamazaki Tomie, jumped into Tamagawa Jousui and drowned...”

Tooko-senpai's gaze moved far away. Her lips, like a mechanism, rhythmically moved.

“The second part of the story was published during the search period. On June 19th, their corpses were found. ‘The Third Handnote’ and the concluding ‘Epilogue’ were published a month later in the July edition. ‘Ningen Shikkaku’ can be said to be a bibliography of Dazai’s life.

The main character was born in a rural well-known traditional family. He was ashamed and afraid of his deviancy, so he plays a bogus clown. Later on he even turned to dangerous social movements. But halfway through he quit. He started to despise himself. To escape from his despair, he chose to live a sinful life.

During that time, he and a waitress of a cafe decided to commit suicide together. The waitress died, but he managed to survive. Because of it, he turned even more inward. He became even more self-doubting and in despair. In the end, he returned to his poor, inward, fruitless life style.

Even his innocent wife was polluted by him. The main character became heavily addicted to drugs. His friends sent him to an asylum, where he ended up as a docile being.

The author Dazai Osamu was also from a rural forest’s landowner family. He too had joined social movements because he wondered whether he would remain as a rich heir for life. He had also tried to commit suicide with a cafe’s waitress, but that too failed.

That time Dazai Osamu was saved, but the waitress died. Afterwards, he married Geisha Oyama Hatsuyo, who followed him from their home town. But after he learned of Hatsuyo’s past, he was traumatized. He tried to kill himself, but again that failed. Afterwards, because of his heavy drug addiction, he was admitted into Musahino Hospital.

After his release, he wrote the basis of 'Ningen Shikkaku', 'Human Lost'. Not long after that, he tried to commit suicide again with his wife Hatsuyo, but as before he failed.

Following this, Dazai Osamu wrote many famous and incredible works. He became a well-known writer. 10 years passed, and he finally rewrote and completed 'Ningen Shikkaku'. Immediately after the completion, he committed suicide. This time Dazai Osamu and his female companion were not revived. This is why everyone thinks 'Ningen Shikkaku' is Dazai Osamu's will."

Tooko Senpai turned her gentle gaze toward me, and asked:

"Konoha, have you ever read Dazai Osamu's works?"

"I read 'Ningen Shikkaku'. Also included in the textbook there are 'Hashire Merosu' and 'Fugaku Hyakkei' right?"

"From what I can remember, 'Hashire Merosu' is usually put into social ethnic textbooks. It is a good article, but it just doesn't taste right.....un Ku-shu!~ Ku-shu~ !Ku-shu~!"

She probably said too much all at once, so she sneezed non-stop multiple times.

"You all right?"

"Hm, I am fine...zu zu. So, Konoha, what do you think of Dazai Osamu after reading his works?"

"I don't really understand. The prologue alone made me feel burdened...but in contrast 'Hashire Merosu' made me feel fired up. The ending is far too casual, I wasn't touched by it; instead I was startled. For 'Fugaku Hyakkei', I only remember the scenes when the pictures were taken. After I read the story, I felt very happy. Moreover, the pacing of the story feels very rhythmic. It is very relaxing to read it. You almost feel like you are conversing with the author."

"Exactly, that's one of the most attractive traits of Dazai's works!"

Tooko-senpai wiped her nose with a pink red Kleenex, squeezed the used paper into a tiny sphere, and threw it into the garbage bin. Then, with an enthusiastic tone, she continued:

"Dazai's works often make their readers feel as if they are in an intimate and realistic conversation with the author. The story that was based on Judas, 'Kakekomi Uttae', reads like a transcription. The intense dialogues were shooting out so fast one has trouble following them. This is an incredible way to set up the events. This kind of subsurface second person point of view is Dazai Osamu's greatest magic. It is 'resonance' between the author and his works."

"Resonance?"

"Yes. Dazai was an author with polarized comments towards him. Even though to people who dislike his works, his works are too dark, melancholic, and heavy. But to people who like him, he

is a very attractive author. One could not help but fall in love with him. In fact, following his death, each year on the day of his death, his readers would hold a Outouki [TL note: a gathering to mourn for his death]. Even up to this day many people still join the gathering. By having such devoted fans, I think it shows he has qualities that few literature giants possess. [TL: I know the last line is not translated properly, but this is the best I could do.]

Why do the fans love Dazai so much? It is because the readers can see their worries and pain reflected from Dazai's works?

‘Aa, I understand this. I am like this as well. This person is the same as me....’ When the readers read his works they often think like this.

Dazai's works have the magic to summon this resonance.

No matter who it is, everyone wants to be understood by others. Each person wants to seek that special person.

Deviancy can be a scary thing. Loneliness too is very miserable. Dazai's works can often, at this moment, directly converse with the inner hearts of its readers. As you flip the pages, you merge with the author. Together you will experience the world of the story. Aaaa, it's like it's my own story. The main character of the story is me...you just can't help but think like this.

According to legends, when Dazai was alive, his readers often wrote letters or diaries to him to reveal their worries. Sometimes he even combined his readers' stories with his books. The story about a normal girl's one day of life, ‘Joseito’, was based on the diary of his reader, ‘Ariake Shzuko no Nikki’. Due to the influence of Dazai's works, even her writing style is similar to him. It is quite believable if you say this is part of Dazai's works.”

“Shuuji Kataoka probably experienced the same resonance with ‘Ningen Shikkaku’. Is that the reason why he wrote this letter?”

“That's possible. Maybe he sees similarities between him and the main character. This is the attraction and at the same time terrifying quality of Dazai's stories...when you are already in a depressed mood, if you read this book, it is very likely that it will push you over the line and into the darkest sea...”

Shuuji Kataoka too is enticed by Dazai, and fell into this painful state.

“But, this letter ended halfway. Would it be like ‘Ningen Shikkaku’ and have second and third handnotes?”

“Ku-shu, gosh. If that is the case, if his problem is not solved before the appearance of the second handnote, he may really commit suicide.”

“Please don't say something that can jinx it.”

“But, just by reading his letter you feel as if you have nowhere else to go...No matter how hungry I am I won’t touch this letter. If I eat this poisonous letter, I too may want to kill myself.”

Tooko-senpai shuddered.

“Then who is S that he mentioned in the letter? And what about ‘her’...does that mean Takeda-san? More importantly, where is Shuuji Kataoka?”

“That’s right. This is the number one problem. We must see Shuuji-senpai as soon as possible. If he really is planning to kill or commit suicide, we must stop him.”

“In the end...the only person who can do it is Takeda-san...”

The following day was a Saturday, school was closed.

On the following Monday, during the break after the first period, Takeda-san, with her lively footsteps, appeared outside the classroom door.

“Konoha-senpai, could I have the letters now?~~”

To the giggling, happier than usual Takeda-san, I cut to the chase.

“Sorry, I can’t write the letters. I need to know more about Shuuji-senpai, or else I can’t write them.”

The smile on Takeda-san’s face disappeared. Her eyes looked like a puppy’s that has been abandoned.

“About Shuuji-senpai, could you tell me more about him? Please tell me everything you know about him. I will write the letters after.

“...”

Takeda-san lowered her head.

Her fingers were twisted together, and she kept on flexing them.

“After school...can you come to the library? I will be waiting for you in the basement book storage room.”

The old spiral staircase creaked as I walked down it. At the bottom there was a grey door.

I knocked on it.

“Come in.”

A voice from inside answered.

As I slowly pulled the door knob backward, I smelled a sweet scent.

It’s not the smell of cream or chocolate- it’s the smell of old books.

The room was covered in dust. There were cobwebs all over the ceiling. Two or three bookshelves were standing in the room, with many stacks of books lying on the floor.

This place was like a graveyard for books. In the middle of the crowded room there was a worn desk and a chair. The lamp on the desk was turned on, and it alone illuminated the whole room.

Takeda-san was sitting in front of the table and was writing on something. With a ‘Pah’ she closed her duck notebook and quietly looked at me. Beside the notebook there was a coffee mug. The drawing on that mug was the same as the notebook’s- they both have a little duck on them.

“This room has cockroaches and mice.”

A light smile appeared on Takeda-san as she said that.

I looked at the bottom of my feet with unease.

“That’s why the other library assistants dislike this place and don’t want to be here; I treat this place as a secret room and often stay in here.”

“...Is, is that right.”

“Konoha-senpai, you dislike roaches?”

“...I don’t think anyone likes them.”

“That’s true, I’ve never heard of things like Cockroach lovers club, or cockroaches’ enthusiasts’ website.”

“...If I have to compare, mice terrify me more than roaches. When I was in elementary school I once stayed in my aunt’s rural home. One day when I woke up I saw a dead mouse next to my pillow. When I shifted my body position, my face rested against the mouse’s corpse. Even though this turned out to be the doing of my aunt’s cat...uhhh, now I am reminded of that sensation.”

I shuddered as I recalled the still warm, blood soaked body of the mouse.

“Ah, that was a disaster. But mice ‘only occasionally appear’, so there is nothing to worry about. If one does appear, I will help you chase it away.”

With a thud, Takeda-san banged her chest with her hand.

“Thanks, I feel much better.”

“Ah, Konoha-senpai, would you like some tea?”

Takeda-san took out an orange water jug, twisted off the lid, and poured an amber colored beverage into it.

“Here, this is roast tea.”

“You have a traditional hobby.”

“Hehehe, sometimes I sneak in here just to have tea.”

The thermal jug kept the roast tea at the best temperature; it was good.

“Thank you.”

I put the lid onto the table and, from my pocket, I took out Shuuji Kataoka’s letter that Takeda-san loaned me yesterday.

“...First of all, you can have it back.”

“...”

Takeda-san silently received the letter. She slipped it into her duck notebook, and tightly held the notebook to her chest.

“I apologize in advance if I am mistaken. I don’t think the letter was meant for Takeda-san. It was written to someone else, is that correct?”

Takeda-san’s finger jolted.

“The letter does not contain the recipient's name. In addition, judging from the content, I don’t think the letter was written to you.”

“...That’s right.”

Takeda-san muttered.

“Shuuji-senpai didn’t give me the letter. I found it by coincidence in a book.”

“A book, from the library?”

“Yes, it was slipped in between Dazai Osamu’s ‘Ningen Shikkaku’. I was curious, so I read it and was shaken by it. It bothered me a lot and I couldn’t stand it, so I went to find Shuuji-senpai.”

“In the Archery Club?”

Takeda-san slightly hesitated, and then forcefully nodded.

“...Yes.”

“But the Archery Club does not have a member named Shuuji Kataoka...”

“No, Shuuji-senpai exists.”

She lifted her head and said intensely.

“It’s true. Shuuji-senpai does exist.”

I don’t understand.

Why does Takeda-san insist that Shuuji Kataoka really exists?

Also, what is the true identity of the Shuuji Kataoka that Takeda-san claimed existed?

Or is Shuuji Kataoka invisible to me and only Takeda-san can see him? That’s scary.

Takeda-san put the notebook back onto the table and kept her face down completely.

A strenuous silence filled this underground room.

I felt as if a mouse was squeaking near us. I tried to change the topic.

“Then, the opening of that letter has its dues from Dazai Osamu’s ‘Ningen Shikkaku’’s content, do you know?”

“...Yes. After I finished the letter, I borrowed ‘Ningen Shikkaku’ and finished it as well.”

Takeda-san smiled weakly.

“But, I am an idiot. Even though I finished ‘Ningen Shikkaku’, I am still unable to comprehend the story. Why does this person feel so much pain...He is rich enough to hire house cleaners. Every time his father goes to Tokyo, he always buys presents for his family. His siblings, friends, and teachers all like him. He is smart and writes many fun works. Women love him; some are even willing to die with him. Why would he feel he is so shameful that he does not deserve to live? This is-too strange. He rants too much. There is no point in living so painfully.”

A grievous expression appeared on Takeda-san's face. Her eyes shone with loneliness. Halfway through her talk, she lowered her head. Her shoulders were shaking greatly, her lips continued to slowly shift.

"...That's all I can think of, I am so useless. I am so dumb. It's true, I am really common, and my head is not good, I am useless. Dazai Osamu and Shuuji-senpai's yearning for death, even if I spent a lifetime thinking about why, I still wouldn't understand. I read 'Ningen Shikkaku' from front to back 5 times, yet I still don't understand...so at last, all I could do is cry."

Takeda-san's grief quietly stained my chest.

To understand the person you love.

But is unable to.

Unable to understand the pain the other person is going through, I once had that experience.

Takeda-san's throat, as if trying to swallow her tears, gave out 'thumping' noises. Then she took the duck mug with her hands.

"...This cup, was a birthday present from my friend; Shii-chan is my best friend. She differs from me. She is very smart and competent...She said I am like this duck, I always look clueless, and am always tripping in places that have nothing to trip over...

I know that I am just a common idiot....but I really want to help Shuuji-senpai. Anything I can do for him, I will do my best to complete it."

Her fierce determination can be seen through her tone.

At least in Takeda-san's heart, Shuuji-senpai does exist. Takeda-san really does love Shuuji-senpai.

Seeing such a show of emotion from her, I cannot find anything to counter.

"I don't understand 'Ningen Shikkaku' either."

I could only say this.

Takeda-san lifted her head and, with her close to breakdown, close to crying, looked at me.

Her lips shook softly.

Would Takeda-san come and take refuge with me, just like what she did on that rainy day? I wondered.

But, all I could hear was a soft squeak from her throat. Both ends of her lips rose and she smiled at me.

“Eheh, ehehe.....That’s why. In the eyes of commoners like you and I, those who are born into a wealthy family and still feel ashamed of themselves...they really do look stupid. Ehehe”

She tried her hardest to squeeze out a smile, but it did not feel cheerful at all. At last she started crying again.

“Konoha-senpai...your, senpai’s face, I like it.”

“Wh- why all of a sudden-”

Her tear covered yet smiling face looked at me, then slowly said:

“Konoha-senpai’s face....looks very beautiful, very gentle.”

Even though I had been mocked that I look like a girl before, this is the first time someone said I was beautiful. I was becoming flustered.

“Takeda-san, that’s a strange thing to say.”

“Eheh, I need to ask Konoha-senpai for a favour. Tomorrow after school, could you accompany me to the Archery Club?”

Takeda-san’s voice was so forceful that I was taken aback.

“Please come with me to the Archery Club. I will take you to Shuuji-senpai.”



S is dangerous.

S sees through everything.

S will destroy me one day.

One day, I will be killed by S.

What a blissful occurrence that will be!



That night, in my own room, I repeatedly read ‘Ningen Shikkaku’, and I fell into deep thought.

(The Archery Club does not have someone called Shuuji Kataoka. So who does Takeda-san plan to show me? Or have I been mistaken all along?)

Despite being a few years since I read ‘Ningen Shikkaku’, I still think the story is so hopelessly distressing. Nevertheless, perhaps I have grown more mature in the past few years, so I can sort of relate to the main character’s thoughts.

Ahh, when I noticed that I am thinking ‘Ah, I thought of that before’ or ‘The main character is the same as me’, I was startled.

(Yikes, have I fallen for Dazai’s magic as well?)

“Konoha, the phone.”

My mother called me from downstairs.

I lifted the extension; The caller was Tooko-senpai.

“Ku-shu, hello, Konoha-kun?”

It’s probably because she forced herself to go to school before, Tooko-senpai’s cold got a lot more serious today. By the second period she had to take sick leave and went home. Before she went she, with unsteady steps, came to find me.

“I will leave Chia-chan to you. Don’t put too much emotion into it. Don’t bully Chia-chan. If a ghost appears, escape as fast as you can. If anything happens phone me immediately, here is my phone number.”

Following that, she wrote her phone number on my right hand with an oil-based marker.

“Ku-shu, ku-shu. That’s great, you got home alright. Why didn’t you phone me? I was worried that you might have been eaten by a ghost. Ku-shu”

I was lying on my bed and looked at the phone number Tooko-senpai wrote on my hand.

Even if she didn’t write it, I could have found her phone number in the club member list (because there are only two members). Knowing that, however, Tooko-senpai still grabbed my hand and, with tears in her eyes due to her constant sneezing, very solemnly wrote on my hand. Tooko-senpai’s hands were unsettlingly hot and damp from sweat.

“Because you are still on your sick bed, I thought I shouldn’t bother you. How do you feel now?”

“I am fine already. Anyway so how did the talk with Chia go?”

This person's definition of 'fine' is absolutely untrustworthy. As I recalled her past reckless actions, I told her of the incident with Takeda-san.

When Tooko-senpai heard that Takeda-san and I were going to go to the Archery club, Tooko-senpai was shocked.

"Maybe Shuuji-senpai's ghost will appear! Konoha-kun, you must not forget to bring salt [TL note: In traditional Japan, salt is used to chase away evil 'beings']."

Why does she always think of ghosts? Do you befriend ghosts? If there exists a book eating monster in this world, I suppose it wouldn't be strange for ghosts to exist as well.

I told her that after I reread 'Ningen Shikkaku' I seemed to have fallen for it a bit. She sneezed, and then started to chuckle:

"I too fell into the dark with the main character when I was in a baaaaaaaad mood. Dazai's magic is truly very fierce."

"Tooko-senpai, you actually get depressed from time to time as well?"

"Yeah, when I was told that I have the Love Daisatsukai."

"Hahaha"

"And when everyone was eating fruit sundae, but only I thought it tasted horrible..."

This time I didn't laugh. Foods that everyone thinks are delicious—to Tooko-senpai, they are just tasteless inorganic objects.

Just like the main character of 'Ningen Shikkaku', who is unable to experience the emotion others can feel, and thus was tortured by it; foods that others find delicious, and yet you alone taste nothing. This is very lonely.

Tooko-senpai sneezed again, and cheerfully said:

"So I used my imagination to imagine myself eating a delicious book, and say 'Wha, so delicious'."

"Because you are the bungaku shoujo."

"Ehen, that's right. Ah, but about 'Ningen Shikkaku', there is one part I couldn't understand."

"Which part?"

“This part-’I do not know the feeling of an empty stomach’. I tried my beeeest to imagine it, but I just couldn’t understand that feeling...Aha, I have been chatting with Konoha-kun for so long, I am starting to get hungry again. Ku-shu!”

“...”

Even when she has a cold; even when she is in a bad mood; Tooko-senpai always behaves like Tooko-senpai.

I told her to consume more Vitamin C to fight the cold, and then I hung up.

A book that is filled with Vitamin C...What would that book be like?

On the following day, perhaps due to her condition, Tooko-senpai did not come to school.

After class, Takeda-san came to my classroom to meet up with me.

“Then, let’s go, Konoha-senpai.”

She seemed so happy, it was as if we were going to an amusement park.

“What the, Inoue is going on a date?”

“No way, nope.”

I only smiled and rejected the leers from my classmates.

Kotobuki-san was still staring at me coldly. ‘And he claimed he was not going out with her. What a liar [TL note: the original word is a slang/saying- I am too lazy to explain it. Suffice to say it means liar.].’ She must be thinking that.

Under the influence of Takeda-san’s pulling, I stepped out of the classroom.

“Then, is Shuuji-senpai really in the Archery Club?”

“You’ve come already, and you are still asking that question? Everything is perfect!”

Perfect? What’s perfect!?

With unease looming over me, we came to the Archery club.

“Excuse me~~~, we are here to observe~”

At the entrance of the practice ranch, Takeda-san loudly declared.

“Hey, Chia-chan, long time no see.”

“Hey hey you’ve even brought your boyfriend with you. Big bro is really surprised, Chia-chan.”

The club members all ran to us and intimately greeted her. Takeda-san seems to be a frequent visitor here.

(So Takeda-san always comes to the Archery Club to see Shuuji-senpai...)

I am becoming more and more confused.

The club members brought two chairs for us, so Takeda-san and I sat down.

Whenever someone hit the red center target, Takeda-san would cheer:

“Uwaha, that’s great~, nice~!”

And she would clap.

In the middle of the process, the fully changed Akutagawa-kun saw me. A strange expression appeared on his face.

I nodded at him, he also greeted me back. Judging from Akutagawa-kun’s personality, I don’t think he would gossip to our classmates. Nonetheless, if he mistakes the act of me coming along with Takeda-san to see them practice, I would still be pretty embarrassed.

I quietly asked Takeda-san:

“Hey, who is Shuuji-senpai?”

“I am looking for him. Ah, that person!”

Following the direction she was pointing, I saw the person she was pointing to was Akutagawa-kun, who was pulling the bow string towards him. His back was straight and expression was serious. He looked very cool.

“Eeeeh, Akutagawa-kun was Shuuji-senpai?”

“Eeeeeeh? Does Konoha-senpai know him?”

“We are classmates. Why is Akutagawa-kun Shuuji-senpai? Akutagawa-kun is a 2nd year student. Also he is a strenuous person that has never even joked once in his life.”

“Aa, he does give you that feeling. He is probably a practitioner of Stoicism.”

Takeda-san just kept on giggling.

“It’s not him! I only wanted to tell Konoha-senpai that he is the best of the Archery Club.”

zubantsu

The arrow Akutagawa-kun shot hit the red center.

“Kya~~~~! Amazing! It was dead center~~~~!”

Takeda-san jumped up and cheered.

“Hey, hey, he is very skilled!”

I was getting a bit irritated.

“~~~~Tsu. Takeda-san, we are not spies from other schools’ archery clubs, nor are we members of the Journalism Club who are interviewing club members for our newspaper articles.”

“I know that. Chia and Konoha-senpai came here to see Shuuji-senpai.”

“Then where is Shuuji-senpai?”

“That...”

Takeda-san sweeps through the ranch once with her eyes.

“Hello, everyone [TL note: the original word is 後輩諸君 (Kohai Shokun), which translates to ‘all you juniors’]! Are you guys practicing hard?”

Four or five adults came over here.

“Ah, Manabe-senpai!”

“Hello everyone, we graduated senpai have come to visit~”

“Good day, Manabe-senpai!”

“Oi, have you gotten any better, Kashiwagi?”

“Yes. I practiced with the instructions senpai gave me, and the arrows really do fly straight when I do that!”

“Good! Show it to me later.”

“Please do!”

“Soeda-senpai and Rihoko-senpai, long time no see as well.”

“Yo, we are here to bother you guys again.”

“Fufu, it’s been such a long time. So nostalgic~~~”

“Rihoko-senpai I heard the expected delivery date is around next year, congratulations!”

“Thank you. It’s a bit early to say that. I quit my job last week, so I am free these days. I will come visit you all next month as well.”

“Hey hey, is that all right, Rihoko? Don’t push yourself!”

“Ufufu, Manabe-kun is always so worried.”

They seemed to be past graduates who came back to see how their kouhai were doing. There was only one female among them; the rest were males.

“I heard that every month the past alumnus would visit and mentor current club members.”

Takeda-san explained to me.

“The handsome guy with the moustache at the ends of the mouth is Manabe-senpai. Ten years ago, he was the captain that led the club to second place in the national finals. Every now and then he summons his former teammates to help mentor these students.”

“You know a lot about it.”

“Because I come here often. I can be said to be the cheerleader of the Archery Club.”

Takeda-san said proudly. Aah, we are getting off topic again. When will I finally meet Shuuji-senpai?

At that instant-

“Shuuji....!”

A terrified shout reached my ears.

I hurriedly looked around.

Has Shuuji-senpai finally appeared?

But no matter where I looked, I couldn’t find a suitable candidate.

“What Shuuji! Don’t be stupid!”

“That’s impossible!”

Other graduates also shouted with horror in their voices.

Where? Where is he?

Suddenly I smelled a mixed scent of sweat and tobacco. Someone, with both his hands, grabbed my face and swung it upward.

That moustached man, with his wide open eyes, stared at me. He is one of the graduates, Manabe-senpai.

“Shuuji...”

From Manabe-san’s mouth I both smelled a scent of tobacco and heard his coarse voice.

With his eyes, he just stared at me as if he wanted to swallow me alive.

I was stunned.

Shuuji is me?!

He means that I am Shuuji Kataoka?

Manabe-san finally removed his hands from my stiff face.

“Wrong person...right?”

The fire in his eyes disappeared. He started to frailly mumble to himself.

“That’s right...Shuuji was already.....Sorry, you look very similar to our friend. Are you a new club member?”

“No, I am a second year student. Today I am here to observe the club practice.”

I don’t know when, but all the graduates have now surrounded me. They looked at me as if they were looking at a ghost.

As these stares are directed towards me, I am confused and don't know how to react.

What's with their eyes? Furthermore, he said that I look identical to Shuuji Kataoka. What is going on?

The female senpai, with a gloomy tone, muttered:

“He really looks like Kataoka, but Kataoka is taller...but their faces are almost the same. He is like Kataoka’s little brother. Hey, what’s your name?”

“I...Inoue Konoha.”

“Konoha...what a strange name, but it’s cute at the same time. Konoha-kun, do you have relatives that have the last name Kataoka?”

“Hey, that’s enough. Rihoko.”

However, another graduate that wore a suit and glasses, a seemingly very smart man, continued on where Rihoko stopped.

“But the similarities are striking. Perhaps Konoha-kun is related to Shuuji in some way.”

“They are not as similar as you claim. Maybe it’s because we all have not seen Shuuji for so long that our memories are getting fuzzy. That’s why we mistook someone who is moderately similar as very similar.”

“That makes sense...Maybe it’s just as Soeda said.”

“Manabe-kun...”

A grim expression appeared on Rihoko-san’s face.

“Excuse me,” I asked without warning, “what kind of person is Shuuji Kataoka?”

All the graduates looked at me. After that, they looked at each other with difficulties.

“Kataoka-kun was a very baffling person.”

Rihoko-san suddenly said.

“He was laid back, always fooling around. Whenever he opened his mouth, he always joked.”

“Enough, Rihoko.” Manabe-san stopped Rihoko from talking any further. Then he smiled bitterly at me:

“Shuuji was a member of the Archery Club. He was around the same year as us.”

Same year!

Then this means Shuuji-senpai and Manabe-san etc. are all alumnus of the same Archery Club.

Shuuji Kataoka does exist.

Except he does not exist in the current Archery Club; he existed in the past Archery Club.

I subconsciously took a glance at Takeda-san. Takeda-san's eyes were also wide open, except she was staring at the alumnus.

What? Takeda-san didn't know Shuuji Kataoka was a graduate of this school? She didn't know anything about him, yet she fell in love with him? How is that possible?

"Then, where is Shuuji-senpai now?"

The Shuuji Kataoka, who always felt 'My concept of happiness differs from the norm of the world's, and this makes me feel as if I am slowly being eaten away'; therefore he chose to play the part of a clown. What is he like?

Standing beside me, Takeda-san lightly gasped.

Manabe-san's face grew darker and darker.

"No one can meet Shuuji anymore. Sorry, this is not a happy topic, so I don't intend on continuing. I apologize for scaring you, Konoha."

"Then let's continue on with the practice."

The glasses wearing alumni good-naturedly shouted. No one is talking about Shuuji-senpai anymore.

All the graduates have moved away to mentor the kouhai. Only Takeda-san and I remained stationary.

Takeda-san's face was stiff. Her eyes were fixed on the center of an arrow target.

Her eyes were razor sharp- as if she saw her hateful enemy.

"Takeda-san"

I called her with my voice. Only then did she turn toward me with an awfully hollow expression:

".....Sorry. Shuuji-senpai didn't come today."

Bungaku Shoujo: Volume1 Chapter4

Chapter 4 - On that Sunny Day of May, He...

Let's talk about S!

S was the person that understands me best. S was my sworn enemy and my good friend. S was my other half and my opposing self.

With S's fearful intelligence, S saw through my everything.

All the clowns' tricks I did to make others think I am perfect, they completely failed on S.

So, I was terrified of S.

Because I was terrified of S, I couldn't escape from S.

In the classroom, in the club, I was always at S's side.

I felt S's eyes were of divine judgement. My constant fear and shame made me tremble and sweat.

The world is hell.

And I am S's slave.



During lunch break the following day, I went to the library to check the past yearbook.

I sat on one of the chairs in the reading room, and started going through the yearbook from 10 years ago.

Inside it was a photo of the national final contest, the one in which the Archery Club got second place. In it are the mustache-less Manabe-senpai, the glasses wearing alumni, with the laughing Rihoko-san holding up the trophy and the certificate.

In it, I did not see a person that fit the description of Shuuji Kataoka.

Following that, I moved on to the class portraits.

I painstakingly looked at each person's face to find one that matched mine. This gave me a funny sensation.

Class One, Class Two, Class Three, Class Four-

Whenever I flipped to the next page, I would feel shaky due to nervousness, as if an icy hand was brushing against my neck.

I found it.

The portrait photos of 3rd Year Class 5.

Underneath each person's photo was a name. One of them said 'Shuuji Kataoka'.

But the place where his portrait should go was empty. On that page there was an empty space that once had a photo.

The photo had been neatly cut out.

There should be a photo in that empty space. What does that mean?

In addition, who cut out and took the portrait?

I jolted.

(Did Shuuji Kataoka transfer schools before graduation?...Or was he hospitalized due to illness or injury, and thus missed the group photo?... Or did he...)

I closed the yearbook and walked to the computer stations. I tried to search the web using the year number from 10 years ago, the name 'Shuuji Kataoka', and the school name.

I found an old news report.

I read the article, and immediately I felt dizzy.

In May, 10 years ago- Seijyou School's third year student Shuuji Kataoka (17 years old) jumped from the school roof and fell to his death.

The phrases 'roof' and 'jumped' tightly clenched my heart. My door of old memories shook violently.

Why did this happen...

My throat was dry, and my head was dizzy.

Why 'roof'?

Why 'jumped'?

This is the worst.

The news report said before he jumped, he even stabbed himself in the chest with a knife. Moreover, because he left a will in his house, the death was judged as a suicide.

A nameless remorse and despair rushed up inside me, and I wanted to throw up.

Aah, why does this always happen!?

Before the second handnote even appeared, Shuuji Kataoka, just like Dazai Osamu, had already committed suicide.

“What! Shuuji-senpai already committed suicide 10 years ago-“

In the Literature Club after school, after Tooko-senpai heard what I found, she was stunned.

“Does Chia-chan knows about this?”

“I don't know.”

I calmly answered.

When I learned from the library's computer that Shuuji Kataoka had already killed himself, both sensations of dizziness and nausea attacked me. I even worried that I may start experiencing those symptoms again. But my confusion, just like sea waves, came and went. Only questions remained.

“There is no way she is seeing a person who died 10 years ago. Takeda-san must be lying to us. Why is she doing this? What does Takeda-san have to gain from that?”

“...She said Konoha-kun looked like Shuuji-senpai, perhaps it’s related to that. Hey Konoha-kun, are you sure you don’t have any relatives with the last name Kataoka?”

“Yes. At least, I have never heard of one.”

On that rainy day, the teary eyed Takeda-san ran to me and called me ‘Shuuji-senpai’. Takeda-san must have known that I looked like Shuuji-senpai.

If that’s the case, why did she try to get close to me?

Tooko-senpai took both ends of her braids with her hands and suddenly stood up.

“I got it! Maybe Shuuji-senpai and Konoha-kun were actually blood related brothers. On the surface Shuuji-senpai killed himself, but the truth is he was involved in a frightening conspiracy. The relatives who pried on his inheritance decided to send out assassins to eliminate the true heir- Konoha-kun. Chia-chan is, in truth, a bodyguard that was sent to protect you, and then and then...”

“Please stop your cheesy story.”

Tooko-senpai became fell-chested.

“Sorry.”

“Your cold is probably cooking up your brain matter right now.”

“So mean! My cold is gone already. Also, my deduction is not entirely off the mark.”

“Deduction? That wasn’t deduction, it was more like delusion!”

“Uuuuhh~~~~~”

Tooko-senpai was very annoyed. Again she puffed her cheeks.

“Okay. We must investigate this matter thoroughly. Maybe my deduction really was ‘correct in some places’!”

“And how are we supposed to investigate something that happened 10 years ago?”

“We can ask the teachers that were in this school 10 years ago, or we can ask past Literature Club members. There should be a way to solve this I think.”

“The Literature Club has graduated members?”

Tooko-senpai puffed up her flat chest and took out a notebook.

“Ehen. What we have here is a notebook that contains the contact information of all the former members of the Seijou School Literature Club. Let’s see, those who graduated 10 years ago...see! There were three people!”

So few!

“Let’s hurry and contact them!”

The somehow very excited Tooko-senpai dragged me out of the Literature Club room. On the first floor there was a courtesy phone. Tooko-senpai looked at the notebook and dialed the phone at the same time. The girl who 'possesses the special ability to destroy machines' (??) Tooko-senpai of course does not have a cell phone. As for me, I have few friends; it’s even less likely for me to have a cell phone.

Let’s start with the first person.

“”The number you have dialed is not in service. Please check your area code and dial again...””

The second person.

“Eh? Kobayashi? This is the Kakimoto house.”

The third person.

“Hohohohohoho, our Masaomi-chan went to work in a research lab in Paris last spring. Hohohohohohoho.”

“Ah-ah well, there are first and second years left anyway.”

Tooko-senpai smiled and flipped the page.

Second year, first person.

“”The number you have dialed is unable to answer your call, please call back later...””

Second year, second person.

“Ha? Literature Club? I am in the middle of a mess. Phone back in half a year.” Ka-chin!

First year-

“No. There are no first year students. It’s blank.”

As Tooko-senpai stared at the empty contact list, she looked half crying.

Why does our club still exist? This problem is even more enigmatic than the real identity of Shuuji Kataoka.

Tooko-senpai hung the phone tube onto her shoulders and started playing with her braids. I calmly told her-

“Let’s stop here! The problem with Takeda-san and Shuuji-senpai, let’s leave it alone.”

To tell the truth, when I learned that Shuuji-senpai killed himself by falling to his death, I was very frightened. The roof reminded me of something I hate most.

Tooko-senpai turned her head around and, with a slightly lonely expression, looked at me.

“Konoha-kun wants to stop here?”

“That...It does feel unpleasant that someone who looked similar to me killed themselves. Also, I do feel that Takeda-san and the Archery Club graduates are hiding something. But, this can’t be helped.”

“...”

Tooko-senpai dejectedly lowered her eyebrows, and then strongly shook her head. Her cat-tail like braids dangled along with her head.

“No, this won’t do. Maybe the spirit of Shuuji-senpai wants to know the truth. That’s why he called us from the other world. If we just leave it at that, Shuuji-senpai will not be able to move on to heaven. And I won’t be able to taste Chia-chan’s personally prepared tasty report.”

‘From the other world’, doesn’t that mean he moved on to heaven already? So in fact what she cares about most is food?...

She tightly grabbed my hands and, with a determined tone, she told me-

“Yes, things can’t be left as they are. We will investigate this a bit more! For this, I...I...I...I will strip!”

What?

On the following day, we came to the school’s music auditorium.

This place was the property of the Orchestra, so it’s not meant to be for class use. I heard that the funds for this auditorium came from the graduates and the supporters of the Orchestra.

The Orchestra has many members, and every year they would join the national contest and get good results from it. In addition, many of its past members ended up to be active in the world stage. I heard even the son of the school board president is from this Orchestra.

Which is why, among the numerous clubs in this school, the Orchestra is very special. Compared to the two members only, storage room-turned-club room Literature Club, it's like comparing a fully equipped secure mansion to a bathroom-less old apartment.

When we pushed open the soundproof heavy front entrance, we saw a huge auditorium that could seat thousands of people. The club members, holding their violin, viola, cello etc., were concentrating on listening to the foreign profession teacher.

“Wow...They are all members of the Orchestra.”

I originally thought the Archery Club was already numerous in head count; I never thought the head count for the Orchestra would be even greater. There were at least a hundred people in here.

“Huh...just because they have many members doesn't mean it's good.”

Tooko-senpai, who was standing next to me, tried to contend.

Other than this huge auditorium, there were numerous smaller rooms. Under the lead of an Orchestra member, we arrived at one of the rooms.

“Here.”

“Thank you, we can go in ourselves.”

“Very well. Excuse me.”

After the member left, a look of resolve appeared on Tooko-senpai's face, and she forcefully pushed open the door.

“Hey, I have come, Maki!”

Suddenly, I smelled a stinging dye smell.

(What is this?)

The room was very bright. The sunlight, though the sky roof, lit up the room. One side of the wall was pasted with painted cloth and sketched book canvas. In the middle of the room there was a canvas leaning on a painting board. In front of the setup sat a female student. In her hand there was a drawing brush. When she saw us, she smiled.

“Ah~, good. You didn't skip on our promise.”

Her long tea color, under the illumination of the sunlight, sparkled in gold. It was so bright that one couldn't help but close his eyes.

Her facial features were well-defined. She was as tall as a guy, which made her seem impressive. She was totally different from Tooko-senpai, in that her chest and her back appeared very well endowed. Her whole body was of lusty attractiveness.

This person was Himekura Maki.

She was the granddaughter of the school board president; she was also the president and the conductor of the Orchestra. Her incredible looks and background made everyone call her 'Hime' [TL note: Princess in Japanese].

"Fuun, so this is Konoha-kun? Aren't you cute. I am Himekura Maki. Just call me Maki."

When her bright and lively eyes turned and looked at me, I felt nervous.

"Nice to meet you, Maki-senpai."

I hurriedly return the greeting. Maki-senpai just looked at me and smiled.

Even though she was given the high class nickname 'Hime' as well as getting special treatment from school, she did not feel ashamed or fazed; she just generously accepted everything.

Perhaps that's because unlike me, she was from a real 'high class' family. Maki-senpai first looked at me with interest, then turned her attention to Tooko-senpai. She happily squinted her eyes.

"Fufun....You even brought Konoha-kun here, you sure are brave, aren't you Tooko? You are aware what we are about to do, right?"

Tooko-senpai puffed her cheeks.

"Maki, about the things I asked of you, did you seriously investigate them for me?"

"Don't think so low of us. Our club, unlike yours, has so many past graduates that we can throw some of them away. It's easy to find someone to tell us what you want."

"Fu, the Literature Club is composed of the few elites."

"Yes yes. Also, all the members of my family clan are from this school. Some of them even work as high-ranking police officers. I have asked some of them to investigate the incident with Shuuji Kataoka."

"And then?"

The corners of Maki-senpai's lips rose very high. She snickered mischievously and looked straight at Tooko-senpai.

"About the intel, we will exchange what we want just as we decided. Are you prepared for it, Tooko?"

"Gosh! I know!"

"Then strip off your clothing and sit on this chair. Ah, just sit in any posture you like, I will pick a good angle."

"Uuuuh~"

Tooko-senpai was blushing furiously. Her slender fingers stopped on the buttons on her chest.

"Please wait a second. What do you mean by 'strip off'? What are you all going to do that she needs to strip?"

I was completely out of the situation. The highly embarrassed Tooko-senpai and the highly cheerful Maki answered at the same time-

"To be a painting model!"

"Yes, in the nude."

What, nude!!!!!!

"After I first saw Tooko during the school opening ceremony, I had been constantly trying to convince her. I wanted to have a chance to paint a portrait of Tooko before we graduated. For a truly beautiful girl, jewelery and clothing are absolute nonsense. I never thought a chance like this would come, so lucky!"

Tooko-senpai's face kept on getting redder and redder.

"No~~~~, wa-wait! I didn't say I will strip all my clothing off. An....and....I need to hear the intel first."

"What you are saying is that, if the intel is satisfying enough, you may strip off all your clothing?"

"That....I may consider that."

"Fufun, anyway let's start! Ah, Konoha-kun, just pick a seat anywhere over there, and enjoy Tooko's nude body in detail."

"Like I said I won't be fully nude!"

I calmly retort-

“Tooko-senpai does not have any breasts! She is a real airport [TL note: airport runway is...flat]! Is it really all right for Tooko-senpai to be your model?”

“Konoha-kun!”

“Why, what a surprise. Have you seen Tooko’s body before?”

“I can imagine it just by looking at the way she wears her clothing. No matter how you look at her, the only thing you see is pure flatness, right? In my opinion, I think it’s better for you to find a more ample model.

“So meeeeeeeean! Y-yes they aren't very big, but there are humps! They are not pure flatness!”

With a ‘puhn’, Maki-senpai couldn’t hold in her laughter anymore. She put her arms on her stomach and started howling with laughter.

“Ahahahaha...aha.....hahahahaha. You have a great personality, boy. Yes, Tooko only has pure flatness.....ahahahahaha.....”

“If you laugh anymore I am leaving! Maki!”

“Kuu...pupu...understood.”

“Gosh! Everyone is such an idiot!”

Tooko-senpai, still looking furious, started to unbutton her shirt.

With a snap, she unbuttoned her top button.

The sight of her white collarbone immediately flashed in my eyes.

“But, Tooko, I am very happy to be able to draw your portrait.”

Maki-senpai crossed her legs and laid open the sketchbook on her knees. She gazed at Tooko-senpai.

“I actually didn’t want to join the Orchestra- I wanted to join the Art Club. But due to a weird tradition, my grandfather stuffed me into the Orchestra. I got this room as a condition for joining. Everyday after school I would spend half my time drawing here. To look at things I want to draw, to completely study every inch of its skin, to challenge every kind of trick- just to be able to draw what that person truly looks like. The time I spend here makes me happier than anything else.”

Maki-senpai said enthusiastically. At the same time she picked up a charcoal pencil and started to sketch Tooko-senpai’s appearance on a blank piece of white paper.

Tooko-senpai sat on a chair and wrapped her arms around one of her knees. She took off the shoe that was on her bent leg... *Ko-Ton* and threw it on the ground.

And then she took off the sock. *Po-Sa*...her pale ankle and her alluring toes were now exposed. Her toenails were the same as her fingernails- they both had a light pink color.

Tooko-senpai moved her face closer to her knee cap and, as if she were someone else, calmly asked-

“Tell me, Maki. Did Shuuji-senpai really commit suicide? When he jumped from the roof, didn't he have a knife stabbed into his chest? Is it possible that someone else stabbed him?”

“It's true that there is a possibility that he was murdered; however, on that knife the police only found Shuuji Kataoka's fingerprints. Furthermore, Shuuji Kataoka did have the motive to commit suicide, a suicide note was also found in his house. These are the reasons the police judged that the death was suicide.”

“Motive...”

- Shuru*

Tooko-senpai loosened her triple knit French braid, and let her hair down. Her shiny black hair was as soft as ocean waves and blanketed her body. And I, as if I was being attracted by her, leaned forward.

Maki-senpai lightly gasped.

Tooko-senpai's expression was both mature and sexy. Her lips were softly closed together; with her sleepy eyes, she dreamily looked forward.

(That was unexpected. Sexy...I never knew you could be described as such, Tooko-senpai.)

“...During that time Shuuji Kataoka was in a relationship with a student from the same year, called Sakiko Kijima. Apparently they really liked each other. Sakiko was a nice and empathic cute girl. Shuuji treasured her very much, and he loved to show off his girlfriend to everyone. Shuuji was already skilled at making other people like him. Often he would gain the other person's favor by telling jokes. If you asked him about Sakiko, he would tell you where they went for dates, what they talked about on the phone the night before, etc. He would tell you everything about them.

Sakiko also loved Shuuji very much. Whenever Shuuji's club activities ended, she would come to the front of the Archery club to wait for him. Then they would affectionately go home together.”

- Ko-Ton*

Tooko-senpai threw her other shoe on the ground.

“But...something happened awhile after they became third years. One day Shuuji had to stay late for the club, so Sakiko had to go home alone. On route, she got into a car accident and died.”

“A car accident...”

Tooko-senpai, still with her dreamy eyes, slowly said to herself.

“The light had turned red already, yet Sakiko ran into the street; she got hit by a truck that was turning in the intersection- she died immediately.”

“.....”

Tooko-senpai silently loosened her other French braid.

Her wavy hair dangled to her waist and covered her slender body. She was as captivating as the Muses, the Goddess of Arts. My throat suddenly became very dry.

“...Why did Sakiko Kijima run out during the red light?”

“Who knows...maybe she was in a hurry? Or maybe she thought no cars were turning... Regardless, Sakiko died; and Shuuji lost his lover. Shuuji felt it was his fault- if only he had gone home with her. A month later- he killed himself.”

In my mind appeared a picture of a male student jumping off the rooftop. My fingers felt numbed, and my mouth stiff.

No, it's not.

This happened ten years ago.

This had nothing to do with 'that'.

To make sure that the senpai remained oblivious to my abnormal reaction, I forcefully controlled my breathing.

Tooko-senpai impassively asked-

“The suicide note that was found in Shuuji's house, what did it say?”

“It said that Sakiko died because of him; and he didn't want to live in a place where Sakiko didn't exist, so he would follow her. Also.....”

Maki-senpai suddenly stopped.

- Pu-chin*

Tooko-senpai unbuttoned her second button.

“...- ‘I am sorry that I am alive in this world.’”

Goosebumps appeared all over my skin as if I personally heard him say that.

Tooko-senpai moved her face on top of her knee caps. She put her index finger on her lips and fell into deep thought.

I ignored the dull pain in my chest and asked Maki-senpai-

“What kind of a person was Shuuji Kataoka?”

“Easy to socialize with, optimistic, liked to joke. Wherever he was at, that place would be filled with laughter. Apparently he knew many people. But when he was alone his true face would appear. He would look very solemn and lonely. Chicks dig this kind of guy, which was why he always had many girls falling for him. He had many female friends. Each girl would describe him as ‘kind’. Everyone agreed he was a nice person...they even said that he would from time to time show a shy expression that rendered girls defenseless.

Whenever he practiced archery, a bunch of girls would gather around him. They would get in the way of everyone else’s practice. Thus Shuuji was often scolded by the club manager. Even then, he would smile at the manager, and the manager would get even angrier. Whenever other people saw this, they would laugh it off- around Shuuji you would always feel an endlessly lively mood.”

Just like the impression Takeda described when we first talked about the personality of Shuuji-senpai.

A cheerful, optimistic, kind and friendly senpai.

Usually humorous, but serious only when he was practicing archery.

But this socializing, cheerful person was only a pitiful clown he created- it was not his real self. In the letter Takeda-san gave me, he repeatedly confessed he was a monster that was incapable of love. The mere existence of him in this world shamed him to no end. He could not let other people be aware of this, so he endlessly wanted to die.

That letter was found in between Osamu Dazai’s ‘Ningen Shikkaku’.

Why did Shuuji Kataoka prepare another death will?

That letter was meant for someone else.

Was it written to S, the person who understood him best, the person who would destroy him?

Or was it written to someone else?

Tooko unbuttoned the third button.

From the gap in her shirt, I spotted a bit of pale skin and white silk undergarments; and from it my heart beat faster.

“Did Shuuji-senpai have any particularly close friends?”

Maki-senpai moved her hands nonstop and greedily stared at Tooko-senpai.

“He had many ‘close friends’, but becoming his ‘special friend’ was very hard. He was usually with two people from his class and the archery club- Shigeru Manabe and Yasuyuki Soeda. In this gang, Manabe was the leader, Soeda formed the detailed plans, and Shuuji was the troublemaker. During that time Manabe started going out with the club manager Rihoko Sena. All five of them would often go out together to play. After Rihoko graduated she broke up with Manabe and started going out with Soeda. Now the latter two are married, and Rihoko became Rihoko Soeda.”

Shigeru Manabe

Yasuyuki Soeda

Rihoko Sena

And the lover, Sakiko Kijima

They all have the initial S.

“Oh right, I even got a photo of Shuuji Kataoka for you here.”

Maki-senpai stopped sketching, turned the photo downward, and passed it in front of us.

“Want to see it?”

“...So perverse, Maki.”

Tooko-senpai said as if she had given up on fighting. She then unbuttoned her fourth button.

Maki-senpai just smiled and did nothing.

Tooko-senpai pointedly looked at Maki-senpai, and unbuttoned her fifth button- also her final button.

Her shirt was completely open. Inside it, her undergarments and chest could be seen. Underneath the white undergarments, she had on a light purple bra. I finally didn't know where I should be looking at.

Maki-senpai was still not doing anything. Tooko-senpai lowered her head, blushed, and said-

“Hey, I was sick right before this. I may get a cold again if I take the shirt off.”

“If you do get a cold, I will bring you to the hospital our family uses. I will prepare a special patient room just for you.”

“Gosh! If you don't let me see the picture our friendship ends here.”

Tooko-senpai puffed her cheeks again. I hurriedly added-

“Tooko-senpai can be very stubborn; she will really end her friendship with you. Furthermore, even if she continues to strip off her clothing, the flat chest won't change, I would imagine. Even if she only has a single piece of undergarment on, her chest would still look flat.”



Suddenly, my head was hit by a drawing board.

“Gosh~~~! Konoha-kun you idiot!!!!”

Her mature and elegant appearance was no more. Instead she, with both hands holding the drawing board, repeatedly smacked it against my head. Tooko-senpai, with tears in her eyes, yelled-

“Idiot! Idiot! Idiot!”

“Ah- stop, let him go, Tooko. I just can’t win against you.”

Maki-senpai was finally willing to turn the photo over.

Tooko-senpai stopped smacking me, and both of us stuck our heads forward to examine the photo.

The photo had three male students and two female students in it. They were all wearing the older style of school uniforms. The lean looking male was Manabe-senpai. The male that was smart looking and had a pair of glasses was Soeda-senpai. The tough looking beautiful girl was Rihoko-senpai. Standing between them, with a slender body and fair skin was probably Sakiko Kijima! And the person that was holding hands with Sakiko while looking very embarrassed was Shuuji Kataoka.

His long bangs dangled over his forehead. His look was as delicate as a girl. There was a pleasant smile on his face.

He was taller and looked more mature than me.

But, other than that-

I couldn't help but draw a deep breath. Tooko-senpai also had her eyes wide open.

"...He really looked like Konoha-kun!"

Yes. Shuuji Kataoka looked like he might be my brother or uncle. He really did look like me.



Why did I become a close friend with S? Even now, when I am looking back, I am still intrigued by it.

At first S hated me. S always glared at me coldly and talked to me harshly.

When I disguised myself as a clown to make others laugh, only S, with S's harsh eyes, looked at me.

This person saw through everything.

This thought made my inner supports disintegrate completely. I, like a puppy whimpering on the ground, could not be in worse state.

But I tried to get close to S. To S, I behaved foolishly, limply, and servilely, just to soften S's attitude towards me.

Perhaps S took pity on me. As if there was no other way to handle me, S started to smile at me. I wanted to be closer to S more and more. I constantly complimented and swore my

loyalty to S. Just like that, S and I eventually became good friends- not unlike a master and its slave.

But S was still my enemy. This fact hadn't changed.

Sometimes S, when I had my clown disguise on, would scold me with sad expressions or with accusing attitude. When S criticized me for lying, I would get a falling feeling, as if I slipped and fell head first into a deep abyss.

Are these my sins? Is it my fault that I can't understand what other people feel? I can't feel sadness, nor can I love another being; thus I have to continue this dangerous play. Is it my fault that I became like this? Aah, this must be true. I was born a sinner. I am Cain, covered by the bark of white birch trees. As such, even when others charged at me, it can't be helped. I am powerless at everything; all I can feel is infinite torture.

What would S ask me to do?

Would S tell me to stop playing a clown?

If everyone learned the truth, that I am a monster, would they chase and stone me?

You all know nothing! A monster that was born as a man; as if being consumed by the flame of inferno, the pain and fear he bears. Nothing- none of you understand!

At this moment, I felt very disgusted with S's 'righteousness'. So hateful that my throat became hot, and my whole body shook in hatred.



How much did Takeda know of Shuuji Kataoka?

On the following day, during the break after the third period, I sat in my chair and contemplated this question.

Takeda-san still hadn't appeared today.

What is Takeda-san thinking? What is her goal?

And why did Kataoka commit suicide after his girlfriend died?

By reading his other 'will', one can see that he was in pain because he was unable to love others. Would a person like him, after the death of his girlfriend, follow her path?

If the death of his girlfriend was not his motive for killing himself, what was the final straw that drove him to suicide?

In the letter, he even said he killed a person. What does that mean? I don't understand.

Maybe he wrote it because he felt that Sakiko's death related to him. Also, judging from the letter's content, it was almost as if the person died in front of him...

Aah, no, there are too many mysteries. It is possible he left behind a second handnote, just like 'Ningen Shikkaku'. For example, he might have slipped it into other works of Osamu Dazai... Aah, but wouldn't someone find the letter soon after he did that...wait a second!

I suddenly thought of an inconsistency.

Takeda-san said that she found Shuuji's letter in 'Ningen Shikkaku'.

Shuuji-senpai jumped from the building ten years ago.

Ten years is a very long time, yet the letter was not discovered, isn't that strange? 'Ningen Shikkaku' is a famous book, so there is no shortage of its borrowers...

I felt the glance of someone and raised my head.

"....."

Kotobuki-san was standing in front of me. She looked at me as if she had something to say.

"The change."

She coolly said.

"What?"

"The 10 yen. You haven't given me that yet."

"Ah, so-sorry."

Damn. I forgot about it. I hurriedly took out my wallet and found that I didn't have a darn 10 yen coin with me.

"Eh, eh..."

"Forget it. Give it to me next time."

"Sorry..."

Uwah, so embarrassing. It was only 10 yen anyway, there is no need to be so uptight about it...

Kotobuki-san looked as if she wanted to complain more, and didn't budge. She was slightly blushing, and her eyes were looking left and right hesitantly. Suddenly she opened her mouth and said-

"Hey, are you aware that Chia Takeda is going out with a first year student? I heard that they really like each other."

"What..."

I was flabbergasted. Kotobuki-san calmly continued-

"It's true. I heard it from another first year library assistant. They started going out in April. Every day they would eat lunch together in the courtyard. Konoha, she is not going out with both of you at the same time, right? Ah, but didn't you say before that you were not going out with her? Then I guess that's none of your business."

"...Thank you for telling me this!"

Kotobuki-san seemed very much taken aback; it must have been because my expression back then was very frightening.

The bell rang. Kotobuki-san just said 'don't forget to return the 10 yen to me', and escaped. She looked as if she was about to cry, but I really didn't have any remaining strength to deal with her.

Takeda-san was going out with a first year student? How did this happen?

During lunch time, I went to the courtyard.

In the May sky there were clouds. The wind was warm as well. There were students everywhere eating their lunch boxes. Takeda-san and her boyfriend, that first year student, were there as well.

They were sitting on the lawn. Each of them had a napkin on their thigh. Their lunch boxes were put on top of it.

The colour of their napkins was different. Takeda-san's was pink. Her boyfriend's was blue. Their lunch boxes differed as well. The boy's lunch box was a size bigger than hers.

Takeda-san was happily chatting with him-

"Hey hey, is it good? Hiro-kun? This shrimp meatball is my new invention."

"It's the best! It's a bit spicy but it's soooo good."

“Ehehe, I prepared it with spices; I also added a bit of leek. It’s very filling, right?”

“Yeah. Chia is really good at cooking~~!”

“For Hiro-kun I always do my best~~”

”Chia, the Basketball Club is taking a break this Sunday. Do you want to see a movie together?”

“Wah~~~~, I will go, I will go! Hurray, this is our fourth time going out on a date!”

Sitting beside Takeda-san was the slightly embarrassed boyfriend. He seemed to be the one that was chasing Takeda-san in the rain. His hair was kept very short; he looked just like an everyday sports boy.

They were chatting very cheerfully. No matter how you looked at them, they seemed to be a very sweet couple.

“Ah....”

Takeda-san finally noticed me. Her face immediately froze.

I didn’t feel like I did something wrong, but my face and my ears started getting hot. I felt shameful and upset. I looked at Takeda-san once, and at once I turned around and left. I hurriedly walked back to the classroom.

(What the hell, this!)

(What’s with this!)

After school, I planned on going to the club room. But when I stepped outside the classroom I saw Takeda-san waiting for me in the hallway.

She was dillydallying and had her mouth closed. I ignored her and silently passed by in front of her.

“Ah...”

Takeda-san followed me.

After we silently walked for a bit, I, with my face still facing forward, coldly asked:

“What is it?”

“.....”

“Are you here to explain what’s between you and your boyfriend?”

“Hi...Hiro-kun is-“

“-that you two started going out in April? That everyday at lunch break you two would go to the courtyard and each lunch that you prepared? That you two already went on three dates?”

Even I felt I was being nasty, but I couldn’t help but be furious.

For the past two weeks I had been writing her love letters. I went to the Archery Club, and I went to the library to search for previous yearbooks. I did a lot to help Takeda-san.

Just from looking at how happy Takeda was when she was talking about Shuuji-senpai, I made up my mind to help Takeda-san communicate her feelings to senpai. Everyday Takeda-san would cheerfully come to me and report what happened between her and Shuuji-senpai that day. Even though I was mocked by my classmates, I still felt very happy to help. When Takeda-san came to me crying, and asked me to help Shuuji-senpai, just like her I felt sad as well.

But she already had a boyfriend since April? And that they had been deeply in love since then?

Stop kidding around!

Upon reaching the plateau in between the staircase steps, I stopped, turned around and glared at Takeda-san.

Takeda-san shrank her body and lowered her head.

“You already had a boyfriend, yet you acted as if you secretly admired a senpai from the archery club. What do you want me to do? What’s your reason?”

Takeda-san looked miserable, but she remained silent.

“If you can’t answer it’s fine. Either way what you told me were all lies. Shuuji Kataoka already died 10 years ago by jumping off the school roof.”

When I said that, Takeda-san looked up in horror. Even though I knew that continuing to attack her wouldn't do anybody any good, I couldn’t hold it in:

“Shuuji Kataoka lives only in your imagination. I don’t want to be toyed around anymore. Even though the incident happened ten years ago, I still feel crummy knowing that someone who looked like me killed himself by jumping off a building. I just want to forget all this, so don’t ever come to my classroom and attempt to find me ever again.”

I turned around and started moving up the staircase. At that moment, Takeda-san, with all the force she could muster, squeezed out a sound and said to me:

“For...for a person like Konoha-senpai...you won’t understand”

I turned around. Takeda was looking at me with a desolate expression.

That expression was the same as the one I got from a girl I once knew. This was the last expression she had on her, when she looked at me. I was flabbergasted.

(Miu.....!)

Takeda-san tightly bit her lips, lowered her head, and ran down the stairs.

And I just stood there, unable to move.

-‘Konoha, surely you don’t understand...’

[Long TL note: This line is extremely important to the story. You will see this line over and over again throughout most of the volumes in this series. Since it’s so important, I will do a bit of explanation here-

There are multiple ways one can translate this line. For example, the simplest (and most logical, surprisingly) translation would be ‘Konoha, you don’t understand.’ As in he currently does not understand. Of course, this implied simple present tense.

This would make sense because as we are all aware, main male characters in anime are dumbasses.

The problem is future tense will also work: ‘Konoha, you won’t understand.’

The original Japanese line uses present tense; unfortunately, their present tense can in some cases encompass future tense. To add to the mix, both tenses will work in the context of the story.

Finally, the original line had the word??? in it. It translates to as ‘surely, definitely’. The Japanese version of the word sounded very ‘right’ in the sentence; but when I tried to translate it to English, all hell broke loose. ‘For sure’ doesn’t sound good; ‘definitely’, nope; ‘clearly’, this implied previous events; ‘doubtless’, too formal...and so on and so forth.

The real translation is something like ‘Konoha, it seems for sure you don’t/won’t understand [why this is happening]...’. By god, that sounded clunky.

Bungaku Shoujo: Volume1 Chapter5

Chapter 5 – The Reasoning of the Literature Girl

What do I need to do to find S's weakness?

If I can rattle S's heart, I must be able to dig out all of S's secrets!

In all of my waking and sleeping time, my mind couldn't stop scheming this. Finally, from an unexpected incident, I got the key to S's destruction.



For the entire last weekend of May, I was melancholic.

When I was playing video games in my room, when I was watching DVDs, when I was playing games with my little sister, and when I was dining with my family, Takeda's desolate expression would appear in my mind. The one sentence that she said 'for a person like Konoha Senpai...you won't understand', combined with her expression would, in my mind, overlap another person's expression and voice. I couldn't get this out of my head and stopped dwelling on this.

Before it was time for dinner, I was playing Sevens with my little sister Maika, who just entered elementary school the last spring. My mother, who was preparing tea for us, asked me-

"Older brother [TL note: Referring to Maika's older brother ie. Konoha . It's a way of referring in many Asian languages], you don't look very energetic. Did something happened in school?"

"No, nothing. Everything is normal."

"Really?"

"Really. Nothing really happened."

My mother smiled lightly and said-

"I see. After you got into senior high, older brother has reverted back to his former energetic self. Your school life must be very pleasant. I am relieved."

“... Yeah, I am happy everyday.”

Even though I am for now a bit disturbed, but starting from tomorrow, my normal life would come back.

No arguments, no standoffs, no larger than necessary hopes and dreams; I just to live a common school life everyday; then after school, I would go to the Literature Club and stay there till the sunset dyed the entire room gold. I would write snacks for Tooko Senpai, listen to her outlandish comments, and then give her snarky comebacks...

“Then, It’s time to eat. Mai chan, tell father that it’s time to eat.”

“Yes~~~~”

Maika, with a loud *patapata*, ran off. Mom then said to me gently-

“Hey, Konoha. Both your father and mother believe it is enough for Konoha to live his life safe and energetic. We are not seeking anything more. [TL note: ‘, so don’t push yourself too hard.’]”

“Thanks mom.”

The me two years ago worried my family greatly.

The price of that unworthy glory cost me the single thing I treasured most in my entire life.

I do not want the same thing to ever happen again.

After dinner, I laid on my bed and listened to my favorite music with my earbuds. The music were lively- ones that would cheer up their listeners.

Suddenly, I thought of Tooko Senpai.

“What did Tooko Senpai eat today?”

I have not been writing snacks for Tooko Senpai these days.

When I told her about Takeda san’s boyfriend, she appeared very sad.

She even stripped in front of a male Kouhai just to gather info, and then she found out she had been tricked all along. It was a very tragic thing indeed, worthy of crying I think.

“I am begging you, don’t make that long face. You will at least get her written report, right? From what I saw, she was very lovey-dovey with that boyfriend of her. She will for sure write the sweetest love report Tooko Senpai has ever tasted!”

I said it jokingly, but Tooko Senpai's face became even more downcast. She slowly shook her head and answered-

“No. The person who should look sad right now is Konoha kun.”

With such an answer, I couldn't talk back to her; so I remained silent.

Both my mother and Tooko are worried about me.

When I thought of this, I felt very ashamed and regretful.

“Let's write something sweet for Tooko Senpai tomorrow...”



As if bit by bit I slowly injected poison into S- S became more and more crazy. All these gradually happened under my calm eyes.

I know S's attitude is not as tranquil as it once was.

S would constantly look around; S's voice would shake.

When S is alone, there would be endless sighs. Sometimes S would even grab one's hair, and then S would, as if frightened, turn around and look behind.

The time is near.

Everything is ready.

What's left is to open the door with the key.

I wrote a letter to S.

I will be waiting for you on the roof.

Let us talk truthfully to each other!



The following day also had good weather.

From the classroom windows the sky outside looked very blue, very clear. The tender leaves of trees sparkled underneath it.

During lunchbreak, when I was sticking my head out of the window to catch some early summer breeze, Akutagawa kun came to me. The silent Akutagawa kun actually came and talked to me—that was rare.

“...On the last Friday the graduates came again. They asked things about you.”

“What? About what?”

“They asked what year and class you are in, and what kind of person you are.”

Maybe because I look like Shuuji Kataoka they are curious what I am like? Now that I know Shuuji Senpai suicided, I can finally understand why they seemed reluctant to answer my question when I look back at when I questioned them about Shuuji Senpai.

“...I just thought it would be better I tell you this.”

“Yeah, thanks Akutagawa kun.”

Akutagawa kun nodded lightly at me, then returned to his seat.

I suddenly remembered that I still owe Kotobuki san 10 yen. I hurriedly took out my wallet-

(Good, I have the money with me today.)

“Here. This is the change you wanted.”

I walked to Kotobuki san and handed her the 10 yen coin. Kotobuki san only moved her eyes away and softly bit her lips.

“...Hm”

“Thanks for paying for me.”

“Ah, that...”

“Yes? Anything else?”

“...Nothing.”

She puffed her cheeks and went quiet again.

Is she embarrassed because she was the one who told me Takeda san already had a boyfriend? I wanted to say something to ease her mind; but at the same time I was afraid that I may say something wrong and anger her. In the end I just put the 10 yen coin on her palm and walked back to my seat.

After school on the hallway, as I was headed to the Literature Club, someone suddenly called out from behind me:

“Konoha kun!”

I turned around and saw an unexpected person panting behind me.

“What is it?”

“I have something important to say. Could you follow me for a second?”

“Eh...but...”

“It won’t take long. Please. This is an emergency.”

“...Okay.”

It doesn’t seem like I have much choice, so I followed the person.

For what reason did this person want to find me? And, that person looked very nervous and frightened, what happened?

The person got on a staircase.

Third story.

Fourth story.

The noise *kon-kon* from the footsteps echoed from the wall. I looked in front of me and advanced silently.

I suddenly realized where we were heading. I was startled.

“Excuse me, where are we going?”

“The roof.”

A wave of fear suddenly seized my heart. I felt the tips of my fingers and lips start to shake and were becoming numbed.

An image appeared in my mind.

A sky that was as blue as the sea; The concrete under my feet; The air that was warped by the heat wave; The shadows of that girl and I; The water tower; The rusted metal railings-

In front of the railing [TL note: ie. 'Behind the railing' in English], she slowly turned around-

"Sorry, I can't go to the roof."

The numbness from my fingertips felt stronger than ever. A powerful unease expanded unstopped in me. Fear made me stop my steps. I wanted to just drop to the floor, but that person forcefully grabbed my wrist and dragged me forward.

I felt a dab of pain from my arm. That dull pain recalled me from my past.

"I need to say to you that I can't let others know; it's just for a bit..."

When I looked at that person's eyes, all I saw were the muddled eyes alike a dead fish's. The tone also became very strange. I, along with my returned consciousness was suddenly attacked by a grave sense of impending danger and fear.

"But the roof-"

"What's with you? What are you afraid of? Did something happen on the roof?"

The other person's voice was shaking; nonetheless that person was still strongly dragging my hand.

"Then, let's go together. You have something to say to me too, right?"

"Please let me go. I do not want to go to the roof!"

That person just dragged me even harder. The person used the free hand to open the roof door.

The wind blew onto my face.

Wind was also blowing on that day. She stood in front of the metal railing, and turned her head to me. Her skirt and the end of the hair were wavering in the cool summer breeze.

(No)

(NO-)

(STOP-)

The person ignored my frantic resist and dragged me to the open roof. There that person yelled at me-

“You wrote the letters, didn’t you!”

What is this person talking about? He mentioned something about me writing letters? Did he mean the draft love letters I wrote for Takeda san?

The fear from the past mingled with the fear of the present. My fingertips were numbed; I had trouble breathing; my head hurts as if someone threw punches left and right at me; My forehead started to sweat; My sight became pitch black.

I couldn’t breathe naturally, so I panted as hard as I could. Ah, it’s those symptoms again. It had been a long time since I experienced them.

“The letters were sent by you! Weren’t they, Shuuji!”

That person tightly grasped the collars of my uniform. The twisted face moved to right in front of my face.

“You are wrong, Soeda san. I am not Shuuji Kataoka!”

“Then, why did you stare at me! Why did you always look at me coldly with that all knowing expression of yours!”

Soeda san yelled.

When I first met him in the Archery Club, I thought he with his glasses looked very intelligent and sober; but now it is as if he became another person. His face was ferocious and made me feel endlessly scared.

Who is this person? Is he really the alumni Soeda san?

“Always! You always just stare at me! Ever since Sakiko Kijima died, you just keep on staring at me! You did not say a word; you just stared at me! By doing that, are you blaming me? It was you who killed Sakiko!”

In between panting and no breathing, I feebly asked him.

“Didn’t, Sakiko san, die, from the accident?”

Soeda san, with his red filled eyes, angrily shouted out-

“Don’t play dumb. On that day, wasn’t it you who said you had to stay behind for club activities, and asked me to walk her home? You even, with that unsuspecting attitude, that always smiling tone of yours told me ‘I will entrust my girlfriend to you.’”

It was I who fell in love with her first. And you, even though you knew what I was feeling, you came and tempted her away and made her fall in love with you. Then when you two started going out, you even dared to come to me and tell me ‘she was in tears when she asked me to go out with her, so I had no choice but to accept.’”

You are always like this! So laidback, so sloppy towards everything. You think you are so funny, but you keep on taking away stuff I wanted. Same with archery, the winner at the end was always you. The girls I've ever liked, they all in turn fell in love with you.

I really despise you. I uncontrollably loathe you. I couldn't let it show, so I just tried my damn hardest to act as if nothing is happening. Yet you always smile when you see I am trying to keep up with the act!

Your kind and gentle attitude and smile deeply disgust me!

‘I will entrust my girlfriend to you’! If it weren't for you, she would have gone out with me. How can you just be all generous and tell me ‘I will entrust my girlfriend to you.’

You knew what I was thinking; nevertheless you still tried to test her to see whether she was loyal to you. There is no denying that you are making a fool out of me!”

The hands that Soeda san had on my collars were pulling harder and harder.

In my mind, the face of Soeda san, the face of Shuuji Kataoka and, finally, the final face of Miu when we were both on the roof- all these faces surfaced in my mind. My conscious was getting blurrier and blurrier.

Hey, why aren't you talking? Are you ignoring me? Why do you look so painful?

I chased her to the roof. Miu smiled sadly and said-

-Konoha, for sure you won't understand.

“You for sure won't understand the pain I am feeling! On that day I confessed to her. I asked her to break up with you and go out with me, and she pushed me away and ran off. She was trying to get away, and she just ran out to the street without checking the light. And then she got hit by that truck that was turning and died. I was very scared. I was a coward who just escaped from that place.

If I – if I didn't confess to her- no, that's wrong. If it weren't for you, none of these would happen, and I wouldn't be a coward who killed her.

After that, you did not ask me about her. You knew that I was with her when the accident happened. Yet, you just silently stare at me. You didn't even ask me 'Weren't you walking her home?'

Is it really that fun to screw around with me?"

My choking throat gave out the panting sound *hyu~~hyu*.

My fingertips were shaking; I almost couldn't breathe.

(No....Shuuji Kataoka was not happy at all. He had always been very much alone and in pain.)

I wanted to tell him these, but I couldn't talk.

The face of Soeda san was disfigured due to extreme inner torment. The hands that he was choking me with got even stronger.

"On that day, I stabbed you with the knife I brought. You tried to seek help, didn't you? That's why you walked towards the metal railing, leaned your body out, and fell to your death! But why? Why? Why did you appear in front of me again? My child will be born next year! I want to forget about you and live a happy life, but why must you come back now and haunt me again! For the past ten years, you kept on wandering inside my mind! And then, now you really do appear in front of me! Why! Why can't you just let me go! I am going to have a kid! I thought I can finally live in peace! If you don't die, I will kill you as many times as it take!"

Soeda san's fingers and the fabric of my clothing combined together to strangle my neck. Soeda san's fingers were shaking.

Fleeting moments of my past, like a lantern, flew past in my mind.

A face suddenly appeared beside me. Miu was looking at me sneeringly. I smelled the sweet scent of shampoo and sweat mixed together.

And the quietly smiling Shuuji Kataoka that was in the picture.

During classes, the Miu that was concentrated in writing to her notebook, and I, who was looking at her slender body with devotion and love.

The face of Soeda san that was twisted by pain; the face of Shuuji Kataoka; the face of Miu.

The Soeda san who stabbed Shuuji to death; the Shuuji Kataoka who fell from the roof; the Miu who stood in front of the railing and turned her head around to me.

Konoha, for sure you won't understand.

For sure you won't understand.

For sure you won't understand.

Miu's body, just like that, slowly leaned backward and fell down.

A segment from 'Ningen Shikkaku' floated to the top of my mind-

The girl is dead.

The girl is dead.

Aah, perhaps I should be dead as well?

At this moment, someone got in between Soeda san and I.

"Stay away from Konoha Senpai!"

Takeda's small body was between us and with it, she pushed Soeda san away.

Freed, my feet were wobbly and I lost my balance. My whole body fell onto the concrete floor. Takeda san hurriedly helped me get back up.

"Konoha Senpai, are you all right?! Konoha Senpai!"

As I was rapidly panting, I weakly yelled out "...Takeda san".

Takeda san's eyebrows were closed together- she was on the verge of tears. She let me lay on the concrete floor, and then turned around to Soeda san. With a fierce voice, she yelled-

"So you were indeed Shuuji senpai's killer. You were that 'S', weren't you, Soeda san!"

"Wh- who are you?"

"I am Chia Takeda from first year. It was I who forged Shuuji senpai's names in those letters and sent them to you. It was also I who asked Soeda san to come to the roof."

"What did you say!?"

Soeda san was dumbfounded.

"Why did you do all these?"

"I wanted to find out the real identity of S. Because that person was with Shuuji Senpai right up to the end."

Takeda san took out the folded letters from her pocket. The sound *kasakasa* can be heard as the papers ruffled against one another. She opened them and showed them to Soeda san.

“In addition to the will Shuuji Senpai left in his house, he left his true will as well. That will was put into a discarded book in the basement storage room. For the past ten years it sat there undiscovered. It was I who discovered it and I read it.

“Shuuji Senpai knew the death of his girlfriend Sakiko san is related to S. However the reason Shuuji Senpai did not say anything was because he was indeed attempting to test Sakiko Senpai. That’s why he asked you to walk her home. As a result of this test, Sakiko Senpai died from the car accident.

In this letter, Shuuji Senpai regretfully said ‘I killed her. It was all because I malevolently tried to test her loyalty that she died.’ This was the reason Shuuji Senpai thought he should be the one to die. He wanted S to kill him!”

Takeda san, with a tone as cool as a cold breeze sweeping through decaying wood, read out the letter I did not know exist.

“S has been cornered.

Due to S’s action, my girlfriend died. S believes the sin cannot be repented; S also worries that someone will discover the truth.

I approached S with my usual attitude. I stared at S, and showed S my smile. S’s mind soon started to crumble. All I did was quietly looked at S’s maddening screams.

From the bottom of my heart I wished the cornered S would become homicidal to me- I wanted S to kill me.

That is the way I will repent my sin to her.

S is my enemy, my friend, and the person who knows me best; therefore, S should be able to read my intention. With all my sincerity, I want S to kill me.’ – this letter stopped at when S was called to the roof.”

The second handnote.

That letter does indeed have a follow up.

Takeda san only showed me the beginning of the letter.

“After I read the letter, I asked each of the teachers about it and did a lot of background check. Finally, I found out that Shuuji Kataoka was a student who committed suicide by jumping off the roof ten years ago. Did Shuuji Senpai really suicide? Or was he killed by S? – These questions constantly popped into my mind. What I do know is that on that day, Shuuji Senpai did meet with S on the roof. S should know the whole truth. I really wanted to find out what happened.

So, using Shuuji senpai's name, I wrote a letter to you- to S, Soeda Senpai. When everyone noticed that Shuuji Senpai looked like Konoha Senpai, you were the calmest out of the group. At that time I already felt curious by this. Later on, did you not look at Konoha Senpai even once? I noticed that while Manabe san kept on studying Konoha Senpai, you on the other hand were attempting to divert your eyes away, as if you really did not want to see Konoha Senpai. So, I took advantage to Shuuji senpai's name, and wrote you a letter that contain past events that only Shuuji Senpai and you knew. Please tell me, on that day, on this roof, what did you talk with Shuuji Senpai?"

"Talk about what-"

Soeda san exhaustedly mumbled:

"We didn't say anything. I stabbed him with my knife, and he silently let me stab him. That's all there was to it."

"What-"

Takeda san yelled out disappointedly.

At that moment-

"That's because he was not S; thus he cannot answer your question."

I turned my neck as hard as possible to the direction of the voice.

I saw a slender body. Its pale forehead had shiny black bangs all over it. And her cat tail like long braids wavered with the wind. Its eyes were clear and wise-

In my sweat-tainted eyesight, Tooko Senpai was standing at the door entrance to the roof. The sight of her entered my eyes clearly.

At that moment, I could feel the warm waves in my chest. I wanted to cry.

Takeda san,

and Soeda san,

they were both looking at Tooko Senpai in awe.

"Who- who are you?"

The shaken Soeda san asked. Tooko Senpai answered definitely-

“The Literature Girl”



Aah, it's such a serious occasion. Does she realize what she is saying?

I dropped my forehead to the burning hot concrete floor toasted by sunlight. My whole body went limped. That's Tooko Senpai for you; no matter what happens, she will always be Tooko Senpai.

“Also, to that boy that is lying on the ground, I am the kindest, the nicest, and the most dependable cute Senpai.”

Who would compliment themselves like that... Soeda san and Takeda san were both speechless.

Tooko Senpai, with her braids swinging behind her, slowly walked to us.

“The wife of Soeda Senpai and their friends came to the Literature Club to find me. They came to ask for the whereabouts of Soeda Senpai.”

Behind Tooko Senpai stood the alumnus Manabe san and Rihoko san. At the sight of them, Soeda san became flustered. His face went pale and he shouted-

“Rihoko, Manabe! Why are you two here?”

Rihoko Senpai only slightly lowered her eyes.

“You have been behaving strangely these days... As if you were afraid of something, something seemed to preoccupy you. And then, today, when I was cleaning your room, I found a letter. I saw that the sender is Kataoka, so I opened and read it. Shocked, I phoned your workplace and heard that you took a sick leave. I got even worried, so I...”

“Rihoko contacted me by phone. She said you might come to the school to find Konoha kun- no, to find Shuuji. Did you really stab Shuuji.... Soeda?”

Manabe san’s voice was filled with boundless distress.

“I knew you liked Sakiko Kijima, I also felt that you were not exactly friendly toward Shuuji. But to kill him? If that’s true then I...”

Manabe san took a look at Rihoko san, and bit his lips as if he was holding in something.

Rihoko san still had her eyes lowered. Both her arms were tightly holding her stomach.

Wife and friend- he had linked his sins to those closest to him. Soeda san appeared completely despaired and shakely said-

“That couldn’t be helped. Only by killing Shuuji could I regain peace...”

In that instant, Tooko Senpai sternly cut into the dialogue.

“No. It wasn’t Soeda Senpai who killed Shuuji san. He is not S. S is someone else!”

“Impossible! But when Soeda san saw Konoha Senpai, his reaction was the strangest. Also, the letter I wrote to him also drove him mad.”

Takeda san countered.

“Chia chan, you have missed the single most important thing. S was the enemy of Shuuji Senpai; at the same time, S also understood him the best. Because Chia chan only showed us the first half of the letter, we can only guess what happened after it. But Shuuji Senpai constantly mentioned that S completely saw through him. The clown tricks only fail in front of S.

So, S could not be Soeda san.

If he truly understood Shuuji Senpai, then he would not have misgivings toward Shuuji. Nor would he have any envies or jealousy.”

Takeda san panic and asked-

“Then... who is S?”

“I am not the famous detective from Baker Street, nor am I a clever old lady who can solve crime while knitting from the comfort of her rocking chair. I am only a ‘Literature Girl’, so I do not know deduction; I can only use delusion as the basis of my imagination, that’s all...

Kataoka Shuuji really adored Osamu Dazai, so he left behind the real death note, the one that described his true inner heart, in the book ‘Ningen Shikkaku’. From his letters alone one can see that Osamu Dazai had a very big influence on him. Like the opening sentence ‘I have lived a life of much shame’, he copied the whole line. Shuuji Kataoka read ‘Ningen Shikkaku’, and thought that the main character, who ‘failed to comprehend the pain felt by those around me’ and ‘was terrified of humans, yet I cannot abandon humans’, who as a result attempted to gain the love of others by playing the clown, was himself. He was resonating.

In ‘Ningen Shikkaku’, two characters recognized the main character’s clown tricks. Incidentally, they were foiled characters. One of them was a junior high classmate of the main character, a buddy called Takeichi. That child always wore worn clothing. He was bad at both school work and sports. He was seen as an inferior student. This apparently harmless boy, however, accused the main character of fakery. He denounced the main character for faking every word and every action. This hit the main character so hard that it was as if the whole world has been scorched by the flame of hell. Afterwards, he became good friends with that boy. He did it to stay at the boy’s side to have him under surveillance.

The other person was the prosecutor that was sent to question him when he alone survived through that group suicide. In the book, the prosecutor ‘has a handsome and righteous face, he appears very smart and stable.’ He immediately saw through the lies made by the main character. When he was looking at the main character with his calm contempt, the main character experienced full taste of ‘3 jugs of cold sweat’ of shame [TL note: a Japanese proverb].

Under the backdrop of a blue sky, with the school roof as the stage, Tooko Senpai, with her long French braids dancing along with the wind, ceaselessly stated her deductions.

Her posture and her way of speaking both cast an unfamiliar stress onto its listeners- none of us dared to interrupt; we all silently listened to Tooko senpai's analysis.

"S is not someone who would worship or envy Shuuji Kataoka. That person always uses the purest, most neutral stance to view Shuuji Kataoka. At other times he would also watch Shuuji with a judging intention.

He was probably someone who always stayed by Shuuji's side. He looked at Shuuji, and handed him judgments for his actions. At times that person may also have given his opinions to Shuuji.

Rihoko san. Your maiden name was Sena, is that correct?"

The wife of Soeda san- Rihoko san looked a bit startled and, with a stiff face, nodded lightly.

"Yes."

"Ten years ago, you were the manager of the Archery club. Back then in the club, many girls liked Shuuji Senpai, so often that there were many girls who came to view his practices. I heard that because of this, Shuuji Senpai would always get scolded by the club manager. Only in front of you, did Shuuji Senpai fail to talk back.

You are S, aren't you?"

Rihoko san took a small breath.

Her arms, which were hugging her stomach, tightened even more so. She raised her head and, looking dead at Tooko Senpai, said with a resolute tone,

"Yes. I am S. I killed both Sakiko and Kataoka."

"Rihoko!"

"What are you talking about, Rihoko!"

Manabe san and Soeda san shouted at the same time.

Soeda san ran to Rihoko san and yelled.

"Stop talking nonsense! I stabbed Shuuji to death! And Sakiko too- I was the reason Sakiko got hit by the car. I saw it with my own eyes, the sight of her lying on the road, covered with blood!"

“But, it was me who made Kataoka stay behind to give you a chance to walk Sakiko home. Also, don’t you remember? I took advantage of the chance that you consulted with me; I strongly urged you to confess to Sakiko.”

“What-“

Soeda san’s voice choked of.

“I said to Kataoka, ‘I will bet you that Sakiko will fall in love with Soeda.’ Kataoka agreed to bet against me. This is why he told you that he had to stay behind in the school for club work, and asked Soeda... asked you to walk Sakiko home. At that time, Kataoka and I were stalking the two of you.”

“What! Then, when Sakiko got hit by the car, you two-“

“Yes. We saw everything. How Sakiko’s body got slammed away and smacked onto the ground. How you panicked and ran away. We witnessed everything.”

Soeda san became completely speechless.

Manabe san took Soeda san’s role and asked Rihoko san.

“Then why did you do all that, Rihoko? Didn’t you say that Shuuji was untrustworthy and you hated him? And back then, we were-“

“Yeah, at that time we were together. You are always very confident, always honest and frank towards everyone. You were very attractive. I really liked you.

In comparison, Kataoka was an undependable person who always makes juvenile jokes. He never showed his true face to anyone, and that truly disgusts me. So, one day, when I finally had enough, I said to him ‘None of what you say is real. You are just trying to trick everyone with your acts.’ When Kataoka heard that, he looked horrified and was ready to break down and cry. His expression looked so fragile, so lonely; So much so that I cannot ever leave him by himself.”

Manabe san and Soeda san both stayed silent.

Tooko Senpai lightly said,

“After that, you became the person who understood Shuuji Senpai the best, and also that’s how you fell in love with him.”

“Yeah. From that day on, only in front of me would Kataoka stop his acts. He would tell me, and only to me, his torments and grief. When someone like Kataoka treats you with all his beings, all his sincerity, do you think a woman can resist?”

Tooko Senpai grievously said,

“No.”

Rihoko san smiled and said,

“...Kataoka kun was very smooth, he was just like a little kid. But at the same time he was very understanding, always attentive. He was someone you couldn't help but fall in love with.”

“What a coincidence... In the diary of Tomie Yamazaki, who committed suicide with Osamu Dazai, she too wrote that Dazai was very sly, but I just cannot help but fall in love with him... Dazai sensei was someone who you couldn't help but fall in love with...”

“Yeah. Kataoka kun liked ‘Ningen Shikkaku’ a lot. He read the book so many times that the book itself was worn out. Even though he told Sakiko that he didn't like to read books, and would fall asleep whenever he reads one.

Kataoka kun may have gone out with Sakiko, but Sakiko knew nothing about Kataoka. For this reason, the burden on Kataoka became heavier and heavier. That's why I instigated Soeda to tempt Sakiko away from Kataoka.

No, perhaps I was just jealous of Sakiko.

My foolish plan resulted in the death of Sakiko, and so Kataoka's guilt became stronger than ever. He was already a mentally unbalanced person to begin with, and now he collapsed completely. Suicide, suicide, this became all he wished for.

Kataoka didn't blame me for Sakiko's death. If he blamed me for her death, I would actually feel a bit better. But instead he just silently stared at me. Whenever I see his ‘please kill me’ face, a heavy weight would push down on me.

I can't kill Kataoka.

But he seeks death.

Even before the accident he wanted to kill himself; now all he ever wished for is death. He truly believed that death was the only way he could free himself from his endless pain.

I didn't know what to do. To help him realize his wish... that's the proof I love him, right?

A month after Sakiko's death, Kataoka wrote me a letter and put it into my desk drawer. In the letter he wrote that he needed to talk to me, and asked me to go up to the roof. I knew that it was time to make the decision that would end everything. When I realized this, my sight went black.

I didn't want to go.

I wanted to skip and go home. If I did that, maybe Kataoka would realize what a fool he was and stop what he was planning.

But, *what if Kataoka decide to die alone?* If my absence made him despair, and he, feeling betrayal in his heart, jumped off the top of the building-[TL note: betrayal is not the right word, but I can't think of any other suitable word.]

When I thought of that, I couldn't hold it any longer... in the end I must go."

"When Rihoko san reached the top of the building, Shuuji Senpai was still alive."

Rihoko Senpai nodded.

"On my way to the roof, I saw a very ghost-faced Soeda run down the staircase. When I pushed open the roof door, I found Kataoka. He had a knife in his chest and was lying on the concrete floor. He looked at me as if he was laughing and crying at the same time, and then muttered 'Hey, I couldn't die from this- the wound is too shallow. My heart won't stop beating because of this.'"

Takeda san, who has been silent, croakily asked,

"And then- what happened?"

"He said...'Kill me.' As if he was begging me, he added, 'I am tired, please kill me.'"

Everyone held their breath.

Rihoko san, with both her voice and her arms trembling, said,

"Kataoka unsteadily stood up and asked me 'can I borrow your handkerchief?' I handed mine to him, and he used it to wipe fingerprints off the handle of the knife. He then handed back the handkerchief and staggered towards the metal railing."

Shuuji Kataoka slowly, slowly walked towards the metal rail.

There, his body became one with Miu's.

I understand- I too have witnessed this scene of despair.

Miu slowly, slowly walked towards her doom.

And then, with her uniforms waving in the wind, she turned and looked at me.

"Kataoka turned and looked at me. He had nothing but sorrow in her eyes."

Miu's eyes were very clear, they looked very alone.

"Sena san, only you can kill me. Even to this instant, I still could not understand a person's heart. Why is Soeda jealous of me? Why does he hate me so much that he wants to stab me to death? I don't understand. When Sakiko died in front of me, even though I saw it with my own

eyes, I didn't feel sad at all. 'I want to die. All I want to do is to die. It's too late to save anything. No matter what I do, no matter what I achieve, everything is now useless. They would only draw on even more shame onto me.' Hey... what did Daizai feel when he wrote that book? I feel that I am very close to him right now. I can completely understand his emotions. To something like me, do I still have the worth to stay alive? Sena san, only you can answer this question. Please tell me the answer'''

Miu said,

--'Konoha, surely you don't understand...'

"It's too late to save Kataoka kun.

If I really do love him, I should at least help him realize his last wish.

So I replied-

'Yes, you are ningen shikkaku.' [TL note: ie. You have lost the right to remain as a human]

I---couldn't say anything.

I didn't make a sound, nor did my feet move. What Miu said, I completely failed to understand.

"A gentle smile appeared on Kataoka's face,

as if he was thanking me for replying.

Then he walked off the roof.

It was I and Dazai who killed Kataoka."

A lonely smile appeared on Miu's face. And then, with her head falling backward, she fell off the roof.

I couldn't do anything.

I let her kill herself- !

"Stop!"

I heard a roar that even could pierce the air apart. For an instant I thought it was my own voice.

But, in reality it was the voice of Soeda san. Soeda san had his knees on the concrete floor, and sobbed with his arms wrapped around his head.

“Stop, I don’t want to hear anymore. It was me who killed Shuuji. And now you say the person you truly love is Shuuji? Then, what am I? Rihoko, why did you agree to marry with me?”

Rihoko san calmly answered,

“Because we are the accomplices, so... it couldn’t be Manabe.”

Manabe’s face was strained. He tightly bit his lips.

Rihoko put her knees onto the floor. She hugged Soeda san and lightly said,

“Hey, Soeda kun. To this day you still hate Kataoka, and you can’t get your mind off him, right? You will remember Kataoka for the rest of your life, right? So will I... I too can’t get him out of my mind, I constantly remember him. No matter how much time has past, I will not forget him. I will always remember him.

So give it up, Soeda kun. You and I are bound by the same person. We are the accomplices that committed the same crime.”

“The baby... The baby will be born soon... but this... how could I live with you now, after all these? It’s like living in hell.”

Tears appeared in between the hands that he covered his face with. They fell onto the concrete floor and wet it.

Takeda san looked at all these with a weak and feeble expression.

“Yes. We will spend the rest of our lives living in hell. But that’s all right, as long as we are willing to face this, no matter where we go, we can live on.

Also, in this world, only I will not blame Soeda for doing something like this to Kataoka. I don’t think of you as a coward, nor do I think of you as shameful or tragic. I want to treasure you even more. If you think of it this way, you would feel a bit better, right?

Hey, Yasuyuki. Let us continue to be reminded of Kataoka. Let us continue to be jailed by him, and then we will live a common and quiet life. We will give birth to the child, and then we will parent him. We will live in hell! It is the only way we can repent to Kataoka.”

The voice of Soeda san sobbing could be heard throughout the roof.

Tooko Senpai, Takeda san, and Manabe san all remained silent.

Then I- what could I do to repent?

What should I do to solace? To be saved?

Miu... Tell me, Miu...

“Konoha kun!”

Tooko Senpai was calling me.

And then I heard footsteps; a braid brushed across my face. I felt someone hugging me tightly. I noticed a scent of violet orchid-

That was the last thing I recognized.

I lost my consciousness due to extreme distress.



The first time I met Tooko Senpai happened a year ago.

The long winter was finally over. One can finally start to feel warmth from the air. It was an afternoon in April.

When people stopped caring about Miu Inoue, I finally put down the heavy burden ‘genius Bishoujo writer.’ The sudden relief of stress actually made me weak throughout my body. In addition, the wound I received from the roof accident had not healed yet.

Even though I entered senior high, I didn’t actively try to make friends; nor did I want to join any club. When it was lunch break or after school, I would stand in the middle of the courtyard and look at the plants in a trance. I would repeat the same boring activity everyday.

One day after school, when I was taking a walk in the courtyard, I noticed a girl sitting underneath a white manglietia tree. Her French braids reached her wraist. She was leaning against the tree and was reading.

Her eyebrows were very long, and her skin was as fair as the white manglietia flower. It felt as if the air surrounding her were steady and clear.

(It’s rare to see people with such long braids nowadays. She looked like a girl from the Taisho-period. But she looks very mature, she is probably older than me...)

When I was busy observing her and trying to come to some sort of conclusion-

That female student teared one of the pages apart.

(Eh?)

As I stood stunned, she put one of the pieces into her mouth.

(Eheheh?)

And then the female student started chewing on that piece of paper. It was as if everything was a dream, I just stood there and stared at her, too stunned to react. Suddenly that female student raised her head and saw me.

(!)

When our eyes met, my heart skipped a beat.

The female student blushes furiously and said shyly,

“You saw that...”

“That, that....sorry!”

“What’s your name? What class are you in?”

“Konoha Inoue. First year 3rd class.”

Then the girl started laughing. Suddenly her expression switched from laughter to innocence.

“So you are a first year student! Then please join the Literature Club.”

“What? Literature... club?”

I opened my eyes wide open and looked at the long French braids/fair skin/black and clear pupils/tearing pages out of books/paper eating girl. She continued,

“I can’t let you leak my secret, so I must make you stay by my side so that I can monitor you. From today on, you are a member of the Literature club.”

“What???? Wait-wait a second- I, the club. You asked me to join the club, but who are you?”

“I am Tooko Amano from 2nd year 8th class. As you see, I am a ‘Literature girl.’”

That was how we met.

After we met, for the entire month, whenever school ended, Tooko Senpai would come to my classroom and look for me.

“Konoha, it’s club activity time.”

She, as if she was a class leader taking care of her fellow classmate who was refusing to come to school, dragged my hands and took me to the Literature club room located at 3rd floor west corner.

When we got to the club room, she handed me a stack of 50 pages genkoo yoshi and said,

“Have you ever heard of where the writing exercise ‘3 topics 1 story’ came from? The one where a wise man would improvise a story based on the 3 topics his listeners give him. I will give you 3 words, and you will have to write something using these 3 words as topics. It doesn’t matter whether it’s a poem, a short story, or a fairytale, just write something. Uhhnn... then let’s go with, ‘snow’, ‘Maccha sabure’[TL note: ‘Green tea favour cake’], ‘Arinkokororin’ You have 50 minutes to complete. So, start now!”

“What is Arinkokororin?!”

“Hey, start writing, or I will jinx you.”

Just like that, I started to write stories everyday.

“I eat stories as if they are bread or rice. Usually I eat books, but what I really like to eat are articles that are handwritten onto papers. Love stories are sweet and tasty, so I prefer it even more than others. That’s why you have to write some su~~~~~per sweet stories!”

Habit can be a scary thing. It didn’t take long before I could write her stories without resistant.

Mostly that’s because she would always criticize my works right in front of me with ‘Hmmm... it’s just missing a certain taste’ or ‘Mooo... the structure is too lax’, and at the same time eat everything I wrote into her stomach. Seeing her like this, I couldn’t help but relent.

Before I realized it, I was already going to the club room whenever school ended, without needing Tooko Senpai coming to my classroom to get me.

“Onii chan, you seem happy these days. Did something good happen at school?”

“No-nothing in particular. Normal.”

I spend my days with a book tearing, paper eating Senpai together- can this really be described as normal? Even though this question lingers in my heart, but very incredibly, whenever I stayed in the classroom, with its sunset-illuminated walls and its small dust dancing in it, I would feel at ease. Sometimes when I couldn’t stand Tooko senpai’s words or actions and retorted her, this too made me feel happy. Only in front of Tooko Senpai did I not need to force myself to smile.

Day after day, I returned to the Literature Club.

“Good day, Konoha kun.”

“I am hungry~~~, Konoha kun.”

“Wah, today’s paper is so sweet and delicious~~~. Konoha kun you are amazing!”

“Gosh Konoha kun! You don’t respect your Senpai at all!”

“Don’t call me a monster~~~! I am just a common ‘Literature girl.’”

Day after day I would chat with Tooko Senpai; I would write snacks for her. Looking at Tooko senpai’s smile, I began to stop thinking about Miu all the time.

That’s why I will be punished.

Sorry, Miu, I am sorry.

I have not forgotten you. It’s just that the flashbacks are very painful.

The stories that you wrote, each of them was very warm and sweet. They, like stars, winkle at those who read them. You, who shared your dreams with me, were so dazzlingly bright that I fell for you.

But why, why did you on that day, throw yourself down the roof? I still don’t know why you did that.

I can’t write anymore.

Because they are all fake. Because I am merely a shell.

The author Miu Inoue exists no more.

He can never write again. He can’t write, nor does he want to write.

When I opened my eyes, someone was gently holding my hands.

The white ceiling.

The white walls.

The bed sheets that smelled like medicine.

“Is this... the hospital?”

“Nope. It’s the infirmary.”

Tooko Senpai answered.

“Konoha kun fainted on the roof. Manabe san carried you down to the infirmary. I actually wanted to carry you, but when I tried to lift your shoulders, I lost my balance and fell onto the floor. I specialize in arts, you see, I can’t do physical work well...”

Tooko Senpai was sitting on a chair next to the bed, and was gently holding my hands.

Between the curtains, an orange ray of light shone through the gap.

“I... how long was I unconscious for?”

“About 2 hours. You sweated a lot... as if you had a nightmare.”

You held my hands during the entire time, didn’t you?

“What about Soeda san and the rest?”

“Soeda san and Rihoko san went home together. I think their love and hatred for Shuuji Senpai will continue for the rest of their lives....they decided to punish themselves together.”

Soeda san cried and lamented that this was like hell.

Those two people, they will remain together as family, right?

Tooko Senpai gently caressed the back of my hands. Gently, softly... as if she was comforting me.

“Manabe san and Chia chan went home as well. Chia chan... Konoha, she wanted me to tell you ‘sorry for dragging you into this.’”

“The reason why Takeda san took me to the Archery club was to let the alumni see me. I look the same as Shuuji Kataoka, that’s why she tried to get close to me.”

“Probably...”

Tooko Senpai dispiritedly said.

A hot stream rushed up from my chest. My throat started to shake.

Takeda san was using me.

All the letters I wrote, they were all garbage.

Takeda san, Soeda san, Rihoko san, Shuuji Senpai- everyone was lying.

They hid the truth.

If that's the case, then they should have held in the truth until the end. Why do they tell the truth now, when things are already at this state?

The cruel reality stabbed me fiercely.

Thanks to this, my heart, which I have wrapped around under layers of protection to prevent it from getting hurt again, became nakedly exposed. Sorrow, pain, pity, remorse, all these emotion assault me at the same time.

To such a mix of different emotions, I do not know how to deal with them. I am already powerless. My throat hurts, my whole body is hot, and the inside of my body feels as if it suffered from burns, they are especially painful-

I pulled my hands away from Tooko senpai's, and used them to cover my ceiling pointing face.

If I don't do it, she will see my crying face.

"I can't stand this... Don't show me any more of the darkness and dirt of reality. I only want to be a normal person and live a normal live. I don't want to experience chaos, adventures, or detective dramas. No more pain, sorrow or bitterness.

But why? Even though everyone understands both sides will get hurt, they still reveal the secrets in their hearts to others? Do they really want to say them that much? Do they really need to be exposed so nakedly? Do they really want others to be enveloped by emotions like sorrow, pain, and hatred? Do they seek murder? Do they seek death?

What Shuuji Senpai felt, what Rihoko san felt, what Soeda san felt, what Takeda san felt, I don't understand anything.

Everyone- is not normal. They are too weird. I hate Daiza."

The tears slide down my face. My shirt collars, yours, and the bed sheets were wetted with my tears.

My neck became cold.

I don't understand.

I don't understand anything.

Shuuji Senpai and Miu both didn't want to live. They both choose to throw themselves off a building.

“*Hiku*... Why does cruel things like this happen over and over again... Which one is abnormal, which one is normal?... *hiku*... I, I don't understand anymore, Tooko Senpai.”

In the disinfectant smell- filled room, I sobbed.

Tooko Senpai didn't say any consolation.

She only sadly said,

“You must find the answer for that yourself. Even if it's painful... even if it's grievous... even if it's bitter... you must use your own feet to find the answer.”

“Then... *hiku*, it doesn't matter if I don't know the answer... I can live on even if I don't know the answer...”

When I said this, what sort of expression did Tooko Senpai have?

I was too naive to ask Tooko Senpai, who was a normal human like me.

Tooko Senpai is not a fortune teller, nor is she a councillor or a psychiatrist.

Even if she is a monster who swallows stories written on pieces of papers, in every other aspect, she is same as us. She is just a high school student. She is just a Literature Girl.

Tooko Senpai didn't say anything.

The sun finally set. In the dark and cold infirmary, she quietly stayed by my side until I stopped crying.

Bungaku Shoujo: Volume1 Chapter6

Chapter 6 - The Proposal of the Literature Girl

A few days had passed after the incident.

Since the incident on the roof, I have not talked to nor seen Takeda-san again.

Yesterday, Kotobuki-san asked me “Your girlfriend hasn’t been coming to the classroom for a while lately, did you two break up?” Kotobuki’s face was red. She lowered her head and began to wobble her body. She sounded like she was very worried.

“We weren’t going out to begin with! Also, there is no need for her to consult with me anymore, so she probably won’t come ever again.”

“Those things don’t matter; it’s just...for the past few weeks...I may have said too much...that...so...”

She lifted her face; when her eyes met with mine, she blushed even more.

“Nev-, never mind.”

She suddenly turned around and walked away slowly.

But as she was walking away, she suddenly stopped and ran back to me.

“So... that... I mean... just never mind!”

She shouted frantically, and then hurriedly walked away.

She was probably planning to apologize to me. Even though she might say something nasty from time to time, she is probably not a bad person.

I still go to the Literature Club every single day. I would absentmindedly listen to Tooko-senpai’s speeches on random life principles or book reviews, and write a 3 topic story as Tooko-senpai’s snack.

“The topics for today are ‘staplers’, ‘amusement park’, and ‘lamb hot pot.’ The time limit is 50 minutes, starting now!”

Kachi

Tooko-senpai rested her arms on the backrest of a chair and moved her upper body forward. She pressed a button on her silver watch to start the timer. Her shoes were off and she was sitting with her knees bent on the chair. Her posture was once again inappropriate.

“What is ‘lamb hot pot’?”

“You never heard of it? That’s goat- a hot pot that is consisted of little lambs. On last night’s TV news report, the local business news section talked about a restaurant in Ginko. They sliced the lamb meat into little thin~~~~~ strips and quickly ran them through pots of boiling soup. They don’t have that funny goat meat taste at all. And they are so soft that if you eat them half raw, they will melt on your tongue. The after meal desert was grape pudding, that looked very tasty as well. After a meal of hot foods, when you eat something cool and sweet, that’s the best. So please write something that will melt in the mouth like the lamb hot pot and cool and sweet like the pudding.”

“Could you stop making confusing comparisons? Gosh...you are too easily influenced by TV and magazines. Furthermore, how do you link random things like ‘staplers’, ‘amusement park’, and ‘lamb hot pot’ together?”

“*That* *Is* where a chef can show off his skills! Hoho, I am looking forward to this.”

“You can write something for yourself from time to time.”

In response to that Tooko-senpai raised her index finger and seriously said,

“Konoha-kun, right now as your senpai, I am teaching you ways of life.”

“What’s that?”

“Foods that are prepared by others taste ten times better than foods you make yourself.”

“Bullshit.”

“Also also, food that one prepares with a dedicated heart tastes a hundred times better! It’s true!”

She was indirectly saying ‘so write with all your heart’. She put her chin on the backrest, and looked at me happily.

That’s it. I decided to write the story about a lamb that, like a porcupine, had many staplers hanging off its back. It got lost in an amusement part, tricked by a witch, and ended up in the witch’s lamb hotpot.

As my pen started to fly on the 50 pages of genkoo yoshi, Tooko-senpai stared at me.

“I can’t write if you keep on staring at me. Go read a book please.”

“Okay, Mr. Chef.”

Just as she said, she turned around. As she swung her legs, she started to read the old books in this room.

At this moment, only the scratching noise of a pen rubbing against papers, and the creaking noise of turning book pages can be heard in this dusty enclosed room.

After a while, Tooko-senpai, with her back towards me, said,

“Hey Konoha-kun, what is Chia-chan doing now?”

My hand stopped momentarily.

However I didn’t want her to know that I was rattled inside, so I resumed writing immediately.

“Who knows...it’s not my business anymore.”

“But she hasn’t given me the report yet!”

Tooko-senpai turned her head and looked at me.

“Konoha-kun, could you go to Chia-chan and retrieve the report for me?”

I was speechless.

“What are you talking about?! I don’t want to.”

“But, but, but, we promised. When the assistance ended she has to give me a report.”

“You will for sure get a stomach from eating that thing! I won’t go! Absolutely won’t go! If you really want to eat that tainted thing, Tooko-senpai can go and get it herself.”

Tooko-senpai looked sad again.

Damn. I may have said too much.

“...Konoha-kun, Chia-chan did lie to you, but they weren’t all lies; some of them were true, right?”

You never asked Chia-chan the reason behind her actions. Do you really want this to end like this? When you wrote the love letters, didn’t you wholeheartedly want to help her?”

“...”

I remained silent and continued on with the writing.

“I am done.”

I tore off 3 pages of the draft notepad and handed them to Tooko-senpai.

“Please finish them.”

My ‘staplers carrying lamb became ingredients for a hotpot’ story must have tasted pretty bizarre. Tooko-senpai, with tears in her eyes, tried to shove the 3 pages down her throat.

“Uu...nasty...uun. This is what I honestly think, wha-what a complex taste. Thi- this is really, really bad...uun...delicious...delicious...truly....uu...if I convince myself it’s delicious, it will become delicious...uu....”

I just can’t handle that person.

All those absurd stories that I wrote nonsensically, she actually swallowed them.

I think it was the spring of last year, when I first joined the literature club.

I intentionally wrote a story very badly. From start to end there was not a single punctuation, or even a consistent story. She also half cryingly finished the whole story.

“Thank you for the meal. Let's see....punctuations are syntax symbols that are inserted into phases to give the reader a chance to rest in between readings. While having too much punctuation will fragment the pace of the story, it might be better to write an excess of them right from the start. Also, perhaps it would be better to cut back on rhymes.”

Just like this, she idiotically gave me a serious review.

No matter how many times I wrote nonsensically, Tooko-senpai would still eat them. Then, on the next day, she would come to my class and say,

“It’s time for the club, Konoha-kun.”

She would greet me with a smile.

Maybe she noticed that back then I locked myself in a shell and avoided interaction with other people, and so she couldn’t ignore me.

She may look very airheaded and sure of herself; a literature shoujo who is immersed in her own world and one who neglects things surrounding her. In truth Tooko-senpai is a stickler to her principles.

I stayed with her for a year already; perhaps her influence has a greater effect on me than I thought.

On the following day after school, I came to the library to find Takeda-san.

“Whatever reasons made Takeda-san trick me, I don’t care anymore. I came here only because Tooko-senpai wouldn’t stop talking about eating Takeda-san’s report, so I have no choice but to come tell her to hurry up.”

As I muttered to myself, I descended down the rusted spiral staircase that connects to the basement book storage room.

*Kan**Kan**Kan*

My footsteps were gradually consumed by the underground silence.

I walked down the last step and knocked on the door. An alerted voice answered me,

“Ye, yes.”

“...I am Inoue from the Literature Club.”

“Konoha-senpai! Ple,please wait a second!”

From inside the room I heard noises of books falling, something moving across, mouse squeaks, and ‘Shu, go away’ (to get rid of the mouse). After a moment of silence, Takeda-san finally opened the door. She stuck her head out hesitantly.

“That...co, come in. I chased the mouse away. It should be...fine now.”

“...Thanks.”

I accepted her offer and went in.

The storage room was just the same as when I entered before. The smell of old paper permeated the room. The room was both dark and dusty.

The lamp on the desk was like a street lamp on a long and deserted street. It gave out a dim light. On the desk were an orange and red water bottle and a mug with a duck printed on it. Beside them laid a metal biscuit box.

“...Tooko-senpai asked me to inquire you about the report.”

Takeda-san lowered her head.

“I am very sorry. I did try to write it, but when I read over everything...it won’t do...I really seem to lack talents in writing.

I didn’t know what I should say in response, so I stayed quiet. Takeda-san kept her head low; her body appeared to be shrinking as she continued-

“I lied to Konoha-senpai and Tooko-senpai, I am very sorry. I...I wanted to be a detective. Each day of my life is so plain and boring...I thought that if I found someone I liked, I might be able to change. If I went out with a boy, and forced myself to like him, then my life would be a bit more enriched...but I remained an ugly duckling...I couldn’t become a princess. At first I did feel quite happy; but I became used to this, ah, this is just the same...

It was at that time that I found Shuuji’s letter here.

After I read it my chest felt terrible, I even cried when I read.

I want to know more about this person.

I want to be closer to this person.

If I can do that, then maybe I can transform myself into someone different. Even someone like me may have the chance to experience those dokidoki [TL note: SFX for heartbeat], fluttering, exciting stories.

This...this was what I thought.”

“...It was you who cut out the portrait from the year book, wasn’t it?”

“Yes. As I investigated and learned more about Shuuji-senpai, I became more fixated on finding the truth behind Shuuji-senpai’s suicide.

Everyday after school I would lock myself in this room, and imagined outrageous scenarios to deduct what had happened. Doing so made me very cheerful- it almost felt as if I had become a real detective.

If only I snapped out of it then...

When I saw Konoha-senpai handing out flyers to new students- you looked just like Shuuji-senpai, I was stunned.

And then, I had an idea.

If I could somehow arrange a meeting between Konoha-senpai and the alumni of the Archery Club, I would be able to figure out who S was; and from that I would find the truth behind Shuuji’s death.”

For this, Takeda-san used Tooko-senpai's love advice mailbox to approach me, and completed her goal.

'Shuuji-senpai is real! It's true!'

Takeda-san did repeatedly assert that.

To Takeda-san, the person Shuuji Kataoka was not a mystic being who existed only in his letter; he was a real person with blood and flesh.

Takeda-san deeply believed that.

Furthermore, Shuuji-senpai was a very important figure in Takeda-san's heart.

But now, Takeda-san looked very lonely.

"It was my idiotic behavior that got Konoha-senpai into a lot of trouble. I am very sorry. Other than the newfound bitterness, nothing about me has changed."

Takeda-san softly lifted up her duck mug.

"My best friend, who gave me this mug, died from a car accident two years ago. She, just like Sakiko-san, got run over by a car-..."

That's why!

The reason why Takeda-san was so obsessed with Shuuji-senpai was perhaps because, just like Shuuji-senpai, she also had someone who died from a car accident. Following that line of thinking, I can understand a bit of what Takeda-san was feeling; my chest became a bit stuffed.

"...That girl was very strong, very optimistic about everything. She was also very smart, a leader of our class. Compared to me, she should be the one who lead a wonderful life..."

Takeda-san's voice trailed off into an almost inaudible mutter.

Her eyes, which were staring at the mug, were now mixed with sorrow.

"Takeda-san...I think living a normal life is not bad! At least for myself, I am in favor of a common life."

"Right..."

Takeda-san smiled lonelyly.

Then, she jerked her head up, and, in a sudden lively tone, she rapidly said-

“Do you know? Today is the 10 year anniversary of Shuuji’s death. So I will...make myself a bit of a final memory. But, I have to go now. Hiro-kun is waiting for me.”

Takeda-san started to clean up the stuff on her desk.

Even though she had a smile on her face, a hint of tears could be seen in her eyes. To prevent those tears from coming out, she tried to open her eyes as much as possible, so her expression appeared very unnatural.

Takeda-san picked up her personal belongings, turned to me, and with a laughing tone said to me-

“I will be going then. I am very happy to have this talk with Konoha-senpai. Thank you for coming to see me.”

“Takeda-san... it’s best if you don’t force yourself to write the report. It’s not like it is a fun job. Even if you do write it nothing would change, I think...”

In an instant, Takeda-san’s face became a bit dazed. She blinked a few times and looked up. A grin appeared on the side of her mouth.

“That’s right...even if I did write it...it would be filled with tragic stories...nothing would change...”

Even though she was just repeating what I had said, I felt a stabbing pain in my chest when I heard that.

Ah, that’s right. Even if the report was written, nothing would change.

Writing cannot save anyone.

Takeda-san softly said “Good bye.”

And gave me her final smile.

KanKanKanKan

In the sweetly scented book storage room, as she ascended the spiral staircase, I quietly listened to her fading footsteps.

I suddenly remembered the raining scene where Takeda-san cried into my chest.

And then, I remembered the smile Takeda-san had when she was eating lunch with her boyfriend at the courtyard.

Soeda-san and Rihoko-san chose to carry the burden of Shuuji Kataoka for the remainder of their lives.

And Takeda-san can finally graduate from the memories of Shuuji-senpai.

After that, she and Hiro-kun will together live through peaceful and normal days.

I sincerely wished that Takeda-san could live happily ever after.

But it was only my wishful thinking.

Dazai, in his 'Ningen Shikkaku', said that the passage of time is the cure, or the redemption, that is bestowed upon everyone equally.

At that moment I was feeling a bit melancholic, so I decided to walk between the bookshelves and absentmindedly browse through the titles of the stack.

I read that book...I haven't read that book...I only glanced through that book... In the dimly lit room, all sorts of different titles flowed through my sight.

"Ah..."

When I saw that title, I stopped.

"It's 'Ningen Shikkaku'..."

It was probably this particular book that contained Shuuji-senpai's letters.

I extended my index finger and tried to pull the book out. The book was stored in a box cover; the faded yellow cover was dotted with tea color dots.

"Uuh, the book is stuck."

I couldn't pull out the book.

"...Hm, is something sticking to the book...? Wah!"

Under my intense pull, the book and a notebook-like object flew out and fell onto the ground.

*ba**saa*

By reflex I bent down to pick up the book, and something came into my eyes. I was startled.

A small piece of photograph was on the floor. The photo, which seemed to have been cut out by a pair of scissors, had a boy in it. The boy, with his nearly identical face, stared back at me.

Right beside the photo was a notebook with a duck printed on its cover.

For whatever reason, it was almost as if someone intentionally hid the notebook here.

Moreover, it was hidden in that ‘Ningen Shikkaku’.

This is just like-

I suddenly felt a sinking feeling in my chest.

I picked up the notebook off the ground, and I hurriedly read over the tiny lettered articles.

When I saw the first line of the notebook, I felt as if I was falling head first into the abyss.

I forced myself to go on; I restrained myself until I reached and finished the last page. Immediately I cursed at my own stupidity, slammed the notebook shut, and dashed out of the door.



Mine has been a life of much shame.

The first time I noticed my deviancy was when my grandmother, who treasured me very much, passed away from this world.

I remember after my grandmother had a heart attack, she had to stay on her bed all the time. Whenever I came near her bed to visit her, she would always gently stroke my head and say, “You are such a good child.” She would look pleased. Her eyes would form two tiny lines as she smiled.

But I was not what my grandmother thought I was- an obedient and empathic child. Her scrawny hands, her shriveled up face, her muddled white hair, and the disgusting medicine stench emitted from her body, all these revolted and horrified me to no end.

“You are such a good child.”

Every time she used that coarse voice to whisper to my ears, I would feel like she had laid a jinx on me. My neck would become stiff, my body would shudder.

If grandmother finds out I am not a good child; if she finds out that I loathe her- no doubt she would stand straight up from her bed. Her white hair would stand on their ends like a yashya, red flames would come out of her hazes, and that would swallow me alive. I was really frightened by these thoughts, so dreaded that I would lie in bed at night, eyes wide open, and cold sweat coming off my back.

As I grew older, I became more and more aware that the difference and the gap between how I thought and how others thought was increasing. Things that saddened or pleased others, I did not feel anything. Not even a tiny bit of these events resonated with my emotion.

Why do others feel happy?

Why do others feel sad?

During track and field competitions or ball games, when everyone excitedly cheered for their teams; or a classmate was about to transfer schools, when everyone sadly said farewell to the classmate, I would be like a linguistically challenged foreigner. I stood among others, and I felt unease spreading throughout my body. I would wane my body posture. My stomach would start to twist itself. Other people are talking non-stop, yet I know nothing of what they say.

Why? Why is everyone crying? Ah, I really don't understand. But, if only I appeared emotionless when everyone else was crying, others would find it strange, so I must make myself cry. But my face is so stiff that it is impossible. My face started to blush again. If others noticed I am only faking my sadness, what should I do? I cannot lift my head, not now. So I lowered my head even further, and put on a melancholic expression. Ah, this time everyone is laughing together. What is so funny about it? I really don't know. But, if I don't have the same reaction as others, they will label me as a queer, and I would have no friends.

Now is the time to laugh. I must laugh, and laugh. No, let's cry, and cry. No, the reaction for this should be laughter, I must react with laughter.

In front of my parents, teachers, and classmates, I struggled to act and react politely. I acted goofily, just to make others like me. Ah, I sincerely hope that no one will ever find out that I am a monster who lacks a human heart. I hope I can camouflage myself into a mere silly and idiotic clown, just to make others laugh with me, pity me, forgive me. And this can go on forever and ever and so will I.

Until I entered high school, until I met S, I never realized I was merely a clown.



As I panted from the dash, I climbed up the staircase that lead to the roof.

The third hand note wasn't written by Shuuji Kataoka; it was written by Takeda-san.

How could I be so foolish?

I have always used my shallow, naive common sense to view the girl Chia Takeda.

Why was Takeda-san so determined to find S?

Why was Takeda-san obsessed with Shuuji Kataoka's death?

My imagination was too lacking.

Takeda-san, her round face, her lively eyes, her childlike behavior, her cheerful smile, her puppy-like pureness, her naivety, her outgoing personality- all I saw was only the surface.

I never once suspected that they were all acts by Takeda-san-!



Let's talk about S!

S was the person that understood me best. She was my sworn enemy and my good friend. She was my other half and my opposing self.

With her fearful intelligence, she saw through my everything.

All the clowns' tricks I did to make others think I was perfect, they completely failed on S.

So, I was terrified of her.

Because I was terrified of her, I couldn't escape from her side.

In the classroom, in the club, I was always at S's side.

I felt S's eyes were of divine judgement. My constant fear and shame made me tremble and sweat.

The world is hell.

And I am S's slave.

On my 14th birthday, S gave me a mug, one that had a duck printed on it.

S said the duck looked as dense as I did.

When I replied with a ‘hehehe’, S looked straight at me and asked do I really want to continue on living like this.

I became afraid.

I am just a monster disguised as a duck; this antagonized S very much.

I tried to shift S’s attention to other things. I put on an exaggerated expression and told a few jokes.

But S didn’t laugh; she angrily said- “Fine, be that way, be a dumb duck forever then” and stormed off.

I chased after S.

If S abandoned me, She would tell everyone what a monster I was!

If I don’t make S cheer up...

If I don’t pull S back...

If I let S leave like that, I may just as well die-!

When I came to this conclusion, I intentionally tripped on the street.

Surprised, S turned her head to me. She frowned as if she gave up, and ran toward me.

Just as I eased up, a car came out of nowhere; it crashed into S’s fragile body and pushed her away. Her body slammed onto the ground, and remained there, motionless.

The girl Shizuka Saitou had died by the hands of the monster known as Chia Takeda.

On that day, the soft flesh was crushed. From it the sweet and sour scent of red blood spread out on the pitch black asphalt road. I, with my hollow heart, stared at the scene.

I, killed, a person.

Perhaps even God does not want to save me●



‘I am really common.’

‘Even though I finished ‘Ningen Shikkaku’, I am still unable to comprehend the story.’

‘I am really common, and my I am not smart, I am useless. Dazai Osamu and Shuuji-senpai’s yearning for death, even if I spend my life thinking about why, I still won’t understand. I read ‘Ningen Shikkaku’ from front to back 5 times, yet I still don’t understand...so at the end, all I could do was cry.’

What were Takeda-san’s true feelings when she said she couldn’t understand ‘Ningen Shikkaku’?

‘So at the end, all I could do was cry.’

What emotion ran through Takeda’s head when she cried?

‘This is-too strange. He rants too much. There is no point in living so painfully.’

What was in her heart when she said those hurtful words?



I said to that boy, yeah we can try going out.

That boy, just like a little puppy, shows an innocent smile.

He has complete untainted trust in me. He entrusts his everything to me.

He is just a naive, pure, kind hearted, positive, the blessed and beloved white goat of god.

A boy like him, makes me filled with jealous and despise. At the same time, I couldn’t stop my longings for his pureness.

Perhaps, maybe, just maybe, this child, can change my being.

People often say love can change a person.

Perhaps this boy can save me from my destruction.

Maybe from now on, I will no longer be a loveless, apathetic monster. I will become a real human.

Ah, I really want to be someone like that.

A burning hot steam rose up in my chest; I fervently prayed for that.

Fall in love with the boy.

Even though the love is fake at first, it might turn into the real thing one day.



The words that Takeda-san said to me, now that I look at them in another context, stood for something completely different.

On that rainy day, when she hugged me near the school building; or when I questioned Takeda-san about the existence of Shuuji-senpai- on both occasion Takeda-san had that sad expression.

I completely misunderstood the reason behind that sorrowful face.



I put on a smile whenever I am in front of him; I kept on repeating, with my sweet voice, that I love him.

Day by day he fell in love with me a bit more; day by day I became sadder and sadder.

Even if I still had that clown act as my disguise, my heart was as weak and tired as a dying patient. At times I would even feel like my body was being spilt apart.

On that rainy day, next to the school building, when that boy's lips touched mine, something in my heart seemed to explode. It wasn't happiness; it was intense repugnance, so much so that all the hair on my body stood up.

Ahh, you surprised me~~! I laughed and ran away as if I was embarrassed.

My vision was spinning all around me. I wanted to vomit something hot and solid from inside my throat. Many times I covered my mouth with my hands. Just like that I ran in the rain.

[illegible]

I can't take this anymore. I hate everything.

How come I am still alive after I killed S?

Shouldn't it be the other way around?

Shouldn't I be the one who is killed by S?

Wasn't it because that was what I long for, that I cowered next to S's feet like a slave, and followed her?

I hated and was afraid of S; but deep in my heart, I looked forward to being destroyed by S.

Only S, it was S, that should have been the person who killed me!

But S is here no more.

I, who is despicable and fragile, cannot face other people's disappointment, denouncement and discrimination. I can only live as a clown in this world for the rest of my life.

Compared to when I was with S, the hell I am left with is much more cruel and has no redemption.



“I think living a normal life is not bad! At least for myself, I am in favour of a common life.”

‘Right...’

Why did I say something as insensitive as this?

I didn't know about this. I didn't know anything.

When I said ‘living a normal life is not bad,’ Takeda-san must have felt an indescribable amount of pain and despair.



I read a letter written by another person like me.

It's like seeing another me. My chest was overwhelmed, without pause my tears kept on rolling down my face.

Ah, I finally meet another person who feels the same as I do.

Only he can understand the sufferings in my heart.

This letter was also written by imitating his letter.

The more I write, the closer I feel I am to him.



Takeda-san read Shuuji Kataoka's letter and became deeply attracted to him, so much so that she relentlessly tried to uncover the truth behind his death. She wasn't attracted because he had qualities she didn't.

She wasn't attracted to him because their personalities were opposite.

She was attracted to him because this person had the same soul as she did; she couldn't help but want to prove that this person once existed.



Who was his S?

What do I need to do to uncover S's weakness?

If I can rattle S's heart, I would be able to dig out all of S's secrets.

Yes, only S knows the cause of his death.

How did he die? Did he choose to commit suicide, or was he killed by S? At his final moment, what did he say? What sort of expression did he have when he died?

As one who has the same soul as he, what sort of answer am I looking for?

This is where my road will lead to.

What's your reason for living? What's your reason for dying?

Ah, I want to know. No matter what happen I want to know. I must know this.

In all of my waking and sleeping time, my mind couldn't stop scheming this. Finally, from an unexpected incident, I got the key to S's destruction.



With the immense pain, as if my chest was being burned by a molten pig iron, I finally understood.

Takeda-san and Shuuji Kataoka were the same kind of person.

They both longed to be destroyed by their S- someone who understood them the best, someone who was at the same time their worst enemy. And they both lost their closest person because of their schemes.

They deeply blamed themselves for it, and slowly, their minds broke down.

After Takeda-san lost her closest friend, Takeda-san was overflowed with the pain from her guilt and conscience. The letter from Shuuji Kataoka served as a compass that was supposed to lead her out of this torture.

So Takeda-san sprang into action.

She let I, who looked like Shuuji, get close to the Archery club alumni to deduce who S was. From this, she sent all my letters to him.



As if bit by bit I slowly injected poison into S- S became more and more crazy. All this gradually happened under my calm eyes.

I know S's attitude is not as tranquil as it once was.

S would constantly look around; S's voice would shake.

When S was alone, there would be endless sighs. Sometimes S would even grab one's hair, and then S would, as if frightened, turn around and look behind.



She wanted to find out what Shuuji really said before he died- was it the same as what she imagined.

How did he die?

Was it murder? Or suicide?

Did someone kill him, or did he choose death by himself?

Takeda wanted to know.

No matter what, she must know.



The time is near.

Everything is ready.

All that's left is to open the door with the key.



In Takeda-san's notebook where she put her confession in, on its last page she wrote-



Konoha-senpai has given me the answer.

Then, let's go up to the roof!



Second floor

Third floor

Forth floor

I felt like the staircase is extending upward into infinity. The nervousness and fear of never reaching Takeda san swelled in my mind.

When I finish climbing the stair, what awaits me at the end? Would it be a tragedy that has already ended?

Just like that time with Miu? Would I stand there, motionless, only there to witness the sight of Takeda san throwing herself down the building?

My heart was about to tear. I felt so dizzy that I was about to collapse.

No more.

Just like that time, I won't make it.

For my own sake I shouldn't go! If I go, I would see things I don't want to see- this would only increase my pain.

I can't go.

My lips and fingertips felt numb. I panted like a wild beast. My vision started to blur.

These symptoms were gone after I entered senior high school; yet when Soeda san dragged me to the roof, I couldn't do so much as to breath.

Just like that time, an immense hunger and unease surged towards me. My body became ice cold. A painful goggling voice was released by my throat. I leaned forward weakly and I had to steady myself by holding the rail.

This hurts so much.

I am about to die.

Ah, I won't make it. It's too late. Even if I do reach the roof it's no use. It's no use. Everyone can only live on unhappily. There is no way to change this. It's too late to say anything.

--No, it's not true.

As I was about to fall into the abyss known as despair, an invisible hand pulled me up.

Maybe it was Tooko Senpai's hand.

It was her who took my limp hand and, without giving up, she pulled me to here.

Tooko senpai never abandoned me.

To me, who was crying about not wanting to work for anything anymore, or was crying about not knowing anything anymore- she would gently said that I must find my own answer.

No matter how painful, how tragic and how awful I feel, I must stand up on my own legs and find my answer.

Like Merosu who didn't want to break his promise with his friend, I stood up and ran as if nothing else is on my mind.

I didn't feel pain and sorrow anymore; I ignored the tearing pain of my heart, nor did I let my shortness of breath and blurry vision bother me anymore. I put all my attention into reaching the roof as fast as possible.

A heavy door appeared at end of the infinite staircase. I slammed into it to open the door.

The color of the sky was as azure as it has always been.

Takeda san was standing outside of the guard rail.

Her little back looked very weak and limp.

"Don't! Takeda san!"

As I yell I ran toward her. She also turned to me in surprised. I saw that she was holding that duck mug. Ah, the sight of her really intending on killing herself made my chest stiff.

"Don't, Takeda san. You can't die. Don't let this be the end of everything! You are not Shuuji Senpai! You are Chia Takeda! You are different from Shuuji Senpai! Just because he suicide doesn't mean you have to do the same!"

A grievous expression appeared on Takeda san's face.

I reached over the guardrail and grabbed Takeda's wrist.

I leaned forward my shoulders to catch my breath, and word by word I said-

"You must find a different answer than Shuuji senpai's!"

When she finally noticed the crumpled notebook in my hand, she bitterly smiled.

“Konoha senpai...that notebook...you have already read it. It was supposed to be...discovered something like ten years later...That was a message to me ten years from now, just like how Shuuji senpai left his letter to- to me. The letter is what’s left...”

“What the hell are you talking about?! You don’t have to go on the same road as Shuuji senpai! Come back here.”

Drops of clear tears rolled down her face as if those were her bitterness about how no one can ever understand her.

“But Konoha senpai, I can’t stand the shame and pain of living in this world anymore.”

Her suppressed voice, soaked with sorrow, pieced into my chest and rendered me speechless.

Konoha, surely you won’t understand.

Ah, is the incident with Miu about to repeat itself on me again?

“Hey, Konoha senpai, did you realize that Shuuji Senpai didn’t choose to kill himself to escape from the guilt of killing Sakiko san? It was because Sakiko san got ran over by a car right in front of him, and he still couldn’t feel anything from it. It was his apathy that made him despair about himself.

It’s the same for me.

I killed Shi chan.

If I didn’t fake the trip, then Shi chan wouldn’t run back and get hit by a car. This is the same as I kill her.

But, even with Shi chan bled to death in front of me, I still couldn’t feel anything.

Even at her funeral I didn’t shed a single tear.

I put myself into a daze.

My family and friends, plus Shi chan’s parent, were whispering around me saying that the sight of my best friend dying in front of me must have traumatized me, and I have closed up my heart as a result. I feel so sorry for her, let her be alone for a moment.

That’s not true!

I wasn’t sad at all!

No matter how I tried to remember my memories with Shi chan to make myself cry, I couldn't do it. I couldn't even squeeze out an ounce of sadness. Shi chan is dead, and I still couldn't feel anything.

This is- this is too weird! A person has died! And she was my best friend! Why do I not feel sad at all, this is too abnormal!"

Takeda san became more and more hysteric; her wet eyes too were becoming more and more despair.

I cannot bring myself to say 'No, that's normal.'

Using my common sense, I know what she said was deviant, so I couldn't counter.

I know very well the fear associated with everyday lives; but I am just a tender child living under my caring parents, I did not live through anything that can make me understand that intense despair that bind Takeda's tortured heart.

"I am not killing myself to escape from the guilt of killing Shi chan- I am killing myself because of my apathy to Shi Chan's death. I am too shameful and fearful of myself, I cannot live.

Dazai said it as well, even if one continues on living, his filthy sins will only increase in number, and his issues will only intensify! He also said 'To seek death is to die. Living is the seed of guilt!' I can not tolerate myself living like this any longer! Konoha senpai, do you think something like me can go on living? Are you still telling me to live my life? Are you going to tell me that death is wrong? I am not supposed to be relieved of my misery?"

The hands that I used to grab Takeda san loosen up a bit.

Rihoko san wanted to relief the tortured Shuuji senpai of his pain, so she accomplished his wish for him.

But-

But I-

My once loosen hands tighten up even more.

Takeda san opened her eyes wide.

"I don't know...I don't know! Maybe I am mistaken, maybe I said some pretty harsh things to you, but I still can't let you die. Even though right now I can't tell you why you mustn't die, but I will help you think of a worthy reason to live! So please don't kill yourself in a rush! Try and live on! I will help you think as well, I will help carry your burden with you! I can do at least that!"

Takeda san was still crying.

“Even if...you tell me this...”

“Please, Takeda san. Please come back to this side.”

“No...I am already...”

Takeda san shook away my hands. Her action caused her to lose her balance and she lost her footing on the ledge.

“Takeda san!”

The duck notebook dropped down onto the concrete floor; the strong wind rapidly turned the pages.

I had my whole body on the floor, with me pulling on one of Takeda’s hand.

Takeda san’s legs, and the other hand that she is using to hold the mug, are dangerously dangling in the wind like kites that are caught by power lines.

“Let me go...let me die like this...”

Takeda san begged me weakly.

“...I won’t!”

My arm is breaking. Ah, if only I didn’t lock myself in my house all the time, if only I am stronger.

“Please! Konoha senpai...”

“Absolutely not!”

No way am I letting you go. Letting you go? When Miu fell right in front of me, all I did was stood there motionless.

Even if I didn’t understand what Miu was feeling, even if I couldn’t said anything that could change her mind, I should have at least ran to her and tightly held onto her.

I could have extended my hands and stopped her.

This is why, this time I will not let go!

“You can’t die! Living by definition means going through humiliations! Even I had a secret identity of being a mysterious bishoujo two years ago. I was so ashamed that I refused to go to school and locked myself in the house. I had no future, and look! I am living fine now!”

Without thinking I yelled that out, and this made Takeda san opened her eyes in shock.

“Gi-girl.....?”

At this moment, because of our sweat, Takeda san’s hand slid away.

But immediately, that hand was caught by another pair of arms coming from my side.

“That’s right. Everyone has something shameful that they don’t want to tell others. I am like that as well. I even ate the copy of “The Great Gatsby” I borrowed from the library awhile ago.”

Tooko Senpai was lying on the ground with her flat chest on the concrete floor. Her face was frowning with pain. Both her hands were in between the guard rails and are now tightly gripping Takeda’s hand.

I quickly used both my arms to hold onto Takeda’s hand as well.

“...Tooko senpai, why are you still here?”

“...Ku, I just went to the library, and a library assistant girl told me that Konoha ran out of the room...so I come to find you...”

For someone like Tooko senpai, who stays in her house even more than I do, it’s probably hard for her to maintain this position.

Takeda san confusedly said-

“Ate the copy of...’The Great Gatsby’...What...the”

Tooko senpai’s pale forehead is dripping sweat now. She strenuously answered-

“...Well...In this world there are many unexplained things! To find the truth behind these events are one of the joys in life!”

Suddenly a rowdy noise can be heard from below.

It’s probably someone on the ground finally noticed us and people were starting to panic.

Takeda san looked down and sighed. Maybe she thought that pulling with us like this won’t do her goal any good, Takeda san looked as if she was about to shake our hands off. Tooko Senpai yelled-

“Other than ‘Ningen Shikkaku’, have you read any other stories by Dazai Osamu?”

“Eh?”

This question caught Takeda san by surprise and she stopped struggling.

Tooko senpai continued to pull on Takeda san’s hand, and forcefully yelled-

“Some people only read ‘Ningen Shikkaku’ and thought that all of Dazai Osamu’s works are filled with moody melancholic and unhealthy tones. This conclusion is made too rashly. If you only read ‘Ningen Shikkaku’, you haven’t read enough to comment on the general themes of Dazai Osamu’s works. In Ethnic class, isn’t ‘Hashire Merosu’ a required reading? Don’t you agree that Merosu, who only went to the market to buy his sister a birthday present, but instead, became filled with righteous anger when he realized the tyranny of the king. He entered the royal palace through the front entrance just so he can assassinate the king. That reckless Merosu, driven by his straight mindedness and innocence, don’t you think he is charming? Don’t you ever feel excited by his sincere friendship with the mason? Merosu is so driven by his belief that he ran back to the mason naked!”

Ah, what are you talking about, Tooko senpai.

I wanted to cover my head with my hands.

But Tooko senpai, with sweat dripping off of face, continued in all seriousness-

“Try and imagine! Even though the story set place in a different time period, it must be very embarrassing to run on the street naked. But Merosu disregarded all these and ran to his friend’s side, even though he had no cloth on. His straight-minded action moved even the cynical, tyrannical and ruthless king!

At the end of the story the mason said ‘Merosu, you are not wearing any clothing.’ From what I remember, the Ethnic class textbook took out this line from the story; you should check out the original scripts! It’s worth doing so just to read this line!

Not only Merosu, he has many other fantastic works that center on love and trust! You must read ‘Hazakura to Mateki.’ In the story, older sister cared so deeply for her terminal sister- it’s so touching! And it’s ending is not solely consisted of sadness; it also has a hint of gentle aura and sparkling of hope. In ‘Yuki no Yoru no Hanashi’, the younger sister who wanted her brother’s bride to see the beautiful snow scene; and in ‘Hifu to Kokoro’, the wife who loved her husband the way a little girl love- everyone are all very pure, very cute. The five siblings in ‘Roman Dourou’, together they write a novel by relay. Everyone live together in harmony- it’s like a slice of life family show. The main female character of ‘Jyoseito’ is so cute you can’t help but want to hug her!

The story ‘Haji’ that has its basis from letters from his female readers, and Dazai’s last story ‘Guddo Bai’, and the story about men who like to dress frivolously ‘Oshare Douji’ - they all are

humours stories that shine on different aspects of life. In the author's note for 'Nyozegamon', you can even see Dazai comically imitating those who tried to provoke Naoya Shiga. If you want to read something that touches your heart, then read 'Chikukun Dan' or 'Kahei'! Those works show the trust and gentleness Dazai had for other people! They are all fantastic works that will reach the deepest part of your heart! It would be a shame to die before you have a chance to read them!"

What kind of persuasion is this!

Would someone actually say this stuff to a person who is about to suicide?

But Tooko senpai was totally serious.

Totally serious, tried her best, did her hardest, and even put her life on the line.

Takeda san's face, which was looking up to Tooko senpai, gradually changed from incredulous to something else. Her eyes became mistier and mistier, and it wasn't long before her tears started falling again.

She must have thought this is too bizarre, too idiotic, yet at the same time she couldn't help but force into submission by Tooko senpai's brazen speech. Now she doesn't know what to do anymore.

Tooko senpai, who had her body covered in sweat and eyes turned red, struggled to continue-

"After the war ended, among the heavily regulated literature works that was released, you must also read 'Otogi Sousei', a comedic story that was based on an ancient story. 'Kachikachi Yama' was written under the same condition as well. I can guarantee you that your jaw will drop when you read them!

See! I told you Dazai didn't only write 'Ningen Shikkaku'!

It's true that he suicide after he completed the book; he also wrote many works that make their readers gloomy and depress. Maybe 'Ningen Shikkaku' was really the answer that Dazai arrived at.

But that's not his everything!

In Dazai works, there are many kind and empathic characters. Many of his characters started out weak and common, but through their determination and effort most of them become strong.

He, inspired by his lover Shizuko Ooda's diary about her fallen noble family, wrote the story 'Shayou'. In the story, the main heroine Kazuko lost both her noble family and her love one, but she still chooses to give birth to the child alone and live on courageously. In the last chapter, with the quiet early morning as the backdrop, Dazai's took the effort to describe the way the sun, with its dazzling rays, slowly rises up to the sky- don't you agree that the scene is very inspirational!

Despite the fact that the sun always set below the horizon; when the night finally passes, the sun will for sure rise again!

The beautiful sceneries and story in his 'Ougon Fuukei', you cannot die without ever experiencing them. At the very least, before you read all of Dazai Osamu's work from front to back a hundred times, before you write thousands of reports and analysis on his works, you can't die!"

The tears streaming off of Takeda san's face fell into the duck mug she was holding.

Her fingers gave way.

The mug fell straight down onto the ground and smashed into a million pieces.

Takeda san, with her now free hand, grabbed onto Tooko senpai's- my hand.

Bungaku Shoujo: Volume1 Epilogue

Epilogue – A New Story



You can't die! – He said to me.

**I will help you think as well; I will help carry your burden with you! I can do at least that!
So please don't kill yourself in a rush!**

You can't die! – She said to me.

She said it would be a shame if I had only read 'Ningen Shikkaku' before I die.

Dasai wrote many wonderful stories; you can't die until you read them all.

These two people tightly held my hand, and desperately tried to convince me.

I cried.

I tearfully laughed.

What's to be sad for, what's to laugh for, what's to be sorrow for, what's to be happy for- I still don't understand them, but my tears wouldn't stop coming out. I think at that moment, my expression must have resembled a monkey in the zoo, or like a new born baby, both look appallingly silly!

I let go of my moist hand, and the mug Shi-chan gave me slipped off from my fingertips.

For me, the mug was to remind me of the crime I committed against Shi-chan; thus I always placed it in my sight.

But when I let it go from my hand and it smashed into the ground, I suddenly felt relief.

My heart became lighter, and I felt I had been set free.

Maybe that's the result of my indifference.

It's possible that I am still unable to survive as a monster that doesn't have a heart!

Perhaps I should have died that day.

But instead I reached out my own hand and held the hands of those two people.

They were both red in their face. They lectured me as they tried to pull me up.

During that time, the teachers and the firemen also got to the top of the roof and helped me back to the other side of the guard rail.

Why did you do that? After I was saved, the teachers and my parents asked me in detail. What's going on? Were you bullied?

It's nothing. I just thought that it would be fun to climb over the guard rail, and I accidentally slipped.

So terrifying, I thought I was going to die!

I answered while looking terrified. Then I got stiffly scolded for playing around.

The rumours about me almost immediately spread throughout my school. Thanks to that I became infamous overnight.

Some people gossiped about me behind my back; some people mocked me right in my face; some looked at me sympathetically.

Of course, there are people who treated me kindly.

Some people are indifferent and their attitudes toward me remain unchanged.

"Did you really attempt suicide? Was something bothering you?"

Others asked me out of concern.

Everyone had a different reaction.

The existence of kind-hearted people means that there will be horrible people as well. Above all there are some that are indifferent to everything.

No matter whether it's school or society, this rule will probably hold.

In these circumstances, I would act airheaded like an impressionable girl, and answer with a laugh- "yeah, it failed. I am a bit embarrassed."

It is hard for a man to change.

From now on I will still wear a clown mask and live by lying to the world.

But I don't feel ashamed about it anymore.

I broke up with Hiro-kun.

'It's not because you are in everyone's spotlight that I am breaking up with you...' He said and moved his eyes away.

I too think that we should put some distance between us.

I said that with a much chillier voice than I usually use. Surprised by that, Hiro-kun looked at me as if I was a stranger, and answered in a low voice 'I understand.'

I know that the Basketball Club manager Hanamura-san secretly liked Hiro-kun.

Because of this, in the past she talked lowly of me; I think Hanamura-san will try and comfort him!

These days, the act of writing these events into the report is not as awful as it once was.

Up to now, when I tried to write about my shallow and hideous real me, I often had to stop and move my eyes away from the notebook.

Those black words looked like some filthy hex, and they made me very afraid.

But now, the more I write, the more I feel that I am expelling the pus that had been rotting in my heart. As I put more stuff into this, I become more cleansed, and my heart becomes calmer and calmer. I now feel as if I can see my faraway future.

I am still a bit regretful that I didn't die that day.

But at the same time, to the senpai of the Literature Club, I am also grateful that yes, I am still alive.

It's true.

In the future, if someone can see through my clown mask, I plan on puffing up my chest, and answering with laughter- 'Yes, you are totally correct. You have sharp eyes!'

If I by chance I meet another someone like Shi-Chan, I won't lie to her again.



Another week has passed since we saved Takeda-san on the roof top.

It was a day in June. The misty spring rain had wetted the green plants, and classes had ended. Takeda-san brought her finished report and came to the Literature Club room.

“Come in. I have been waiting for it.”

Tooko-senpai had gone to the library, so I was receiving the report in her place.

“Wah, this is a thick pile. You put in a lot of effort.”

“Ehehe, I wrote a lot. You know, Konoha-senpai, in the storage basement you told me that writing won't change anything, right?”

Takeda-san looked at me happily.

“That's what I thought as well. But ever since I wrote this report, I feel that writing is helpful. It definitely has an effect!”

“Yeah, probably.”

The stories that Miu wrote- they all made me feel very warm and refreshed.

When she bound her completed drafts into a booklet, Miu also had a happy look on her face.

Those days were not all lies.

So, just as Takeda-san said, perhaps writing does have the power to heal and to redeem.

“Oh yeah, Konoha-senpai mentioned about used to be a girl?”

“Ehhh, th-that's-“

“On the roof you said you used to be a mysterious bishoujo. Don't tell me you have gender identity disorder or is a transgender? Or were you a drag queen?”

“Uwaaaaaaah, that, that, that was-“

“Tooko-senpai also said that she ate the library's books. I am very curious, what's that?”

“Th-Th-Th-Th-That was just the result of her being nervous and babbling without consideration. I am begging you! Please forget them!”

My face became deep red, and I started to panic. Takeda looked at me, and then her face changed to an expression as if she understood. A smile appeared on her face.

It’s possible this is a real expression of Takeda-san that she never showed others before.

“Ok, I understand. Everyone has something embarrassing that they don’t want others to know. I will keep these secrets inside my heart.”

“Thank you.”

I was relieved. My secret aside, it would be bad if other people find out about Tooko-senpai’s secret. Those TV reporters and unidentified monster experts will want to have more than a word with her.

“Konoha-senpai, could I keep the love letters you wrote for me?”

“Eh? You still have them?”

Takeda-san laughed innocently just as she had always done.

“Yes. I keep all the letters in my favourite cookie box, and hold on to them preciously.”

Wah, I feel a bit embarrassed. But since Takeda-san did agree to keep those secrets to herself, I have no choice but to agree.

“But you must promise me that you will never show them to other people.”

“Eheh, I will treat them as my treasure.”

She asked me to say hello to Tooko-senpai for her; after she said she would come back here to see us again, she left.

I sat down on a chair and started to read Takeda-san’s report.

The gentle showering noise of the rain overlapped with the sound of pages turning.

The comfortable sound, like a lullaby in a mother’s womb, resonated tenderly.

The rain had stopped without me realizing it. The sunset had painted the club room with a golden gleam.

How long has passed?

I had my head down from reading the report. Suddenly I felt a dull itchiness on the back of my neck as if something resembling the tail of a cat brushed against it. I subconsciously grabbed it with my hand.

(?)

The thing that was brushing against is not a cat tail; it's one of the braids of Tooko-senpai.

I looked to my side. I don't know when but Tooko-senpai had come back from the library. She apparently moved a chair behind my seat, sat down on it, leaned her upper body forward, and read the report with me over my shoulder.

(Wah!)

Tooko-senpai probably had her full attention on the report. Her right index finger was touching her lips. She looked at the book with a lost in thought expression. Even when I grabbed her braids she didn't even notice.

Not only that, Tooko-senpai leaned forward too much. Her cheeks were on the verge of touching mine. Her fallen eyebrows were flickered with golden lights. Our distance was so close that if I leaned backward just a bit I could kiss her.

“To,To,To,To-To-To-To-To-Tooko-senpai-“

“Flip to, the next page, Konoha-kun.”

What the.

Tooko's eyes were fixated on the report as she lightly said to my ear.

“That, but, this-“

“Hurry...”

She was completely absorbed by it. Now that she was in this trance state, anything I say would be ignored.

The ears of the bungaku shoujo cannot hear any words anymore.

“Ye-yes.”

I gave up as well; I resumed reading the report.

As I savor the violet sweet scent of Tooko-senpai, as I feel her bodily warmth, as I let her soft braids brush against my neck, together in this room, dyed by the sunset, we read Takeda-san's report together.

When the faint golden sunset turned into crimson red, we finally finished reading.

Tooko-senpai lightly sighed.

Then she realized that my face was red and my body was frozen stiff, she quickly backed away from me.

“Ya, kya! Sorry!”

By reflex she jerked backward. Her chair, hit by the sudden force, flipped backward. Now that she lost her support, she fell backward as well- she ended up on the ground facing the ceiling.

“Acha-“

“Haun, my b-butt hit the ground...”

With her skirt flipped backward to her thigh, Tooko-senpai's eyes were filled with tears.

“Are you all right?”

“My butt hurts...”

She straightened out her skirt and changed to a sitting position.

When her eyes met with mine, she started blushing furiously. But it wasn't long before she changed to a gentle expression and smiled at me.

“But...Chia-chan seems fine now. This is great.”

I smiled as well.

“Yeah.”

I pulled on Tooko-senpai's hand and helped her up.

I respectfully handed her the report.

“Then, here it is for you to enjoy, milady.”

Tooko-senpai, illuminated by the setting sun, gracefully walked to her chair. She sat down, more courteously than she usually does, and ceremoniously accepted the report.

“Bon appétit.”

With a smile she looked at the report, and then started reading the first page.

Whenever she finished a page, she would tear that page out, and chew on it from its corners.

“...Bitter,”

With a slight frown, she muttered. Nonetheless she still, bite by bite, chewed on the pages and swallowed them.

“very bitter...”

This report was probably far from the fluff and sweet snack that she was expecting.

Her fair skin, uniform, and her braids, they were all shaded with a lonesome sunset color.

Even if the sun set below the horizon, when the night passed, the sun would rise again. On the roof, Tooko-senpai said this to Takeda-san.

No matter how painful or sorrowful the experience was, a drastically different tomorrow will come.

Just like this, as we welcome the arrival of each new day; maybe we can gradually change.

Even those wounds that we thought may never heal; maybe they will eventually be cured.

On that day, Miu flew down from the roof. Wouldn't it be great if she could be somewhere laughing as well.

Even if we can never meet again, as long as she, under this sunset sky, can smile somewhere...

That's probably only my wishful thinking.

I laid open the binded genkoo yoshi and started writing.

Tooko-senpai, who continued to eat the report, asked me-

“What are you writing?”

“It's a secret.”

“Hey, Konoha-kun...try writing a novel someday. Konoha-kun's novel, you must let me read it.”

Tooko-senpai suddenly said that. My heart skipped a beat.

I raised my head, and saw Tooko-senpai's warm smile.

She doesn't know about my humiliating past, right?

So that was probably one of her offhand comments.

Tooko-senpai shifted her attention back to her meal.

I too continued on writing on the draft paper.

Would there be the day, when I would hold a pen again for a novel? What would I write about-
Right now I do not know.

But for today, I will write a sweet story for Tooko-Senpai.

This will be her dessert after she finishes that bitter story.